## Questions for Discussion

What do you believe is more important than knowledge?

Beyond knowledge, what are the qualities that we need to make us fully human?

Are there things we might do or qualities we might work to attain that could make us more like God?

# What Was Gained and What Was Lost in “The Fall”?

## Four brief essays

Free will is bestowed on every human being. If one desires to turn toward the good way and the righteous, he has the power to do so. If one wishes to turn toward the evil way or be wicked, he is at liberty to do so….Let not the notion expressed by foolish…[and] senseless folks among Israelites pass through your mind that at the beginning of a person’s existence, the Almighty decrees that he is to be either righteous or wicked; this is not so: every human being may become righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam; wise or foolish, merciful or cruel; niggardly or generous; and so with all other qualities. There is no one that coerces him or decrees what he is to do or draws him to either of the two ways; but every person turns to the ways which he desires, spontaneously and of his own volition.

—Maimonides, Mishneh Torah

We may view all our deeds up to this moment as balanced between good and evil, and hope our answer to God’s question to Adam—”Where are you?” (Genesis 3.9)—will tip the balance in our favor among the accountants in charge of the book of life. In this struggle for honesty and courage, for shame and repentance, you should remember that every single biblical hero from Adam to Moses was flawed….For each of them, shame was not an obstacle but an engine for their greatness. Answering the question of “Where are you?” brought them humility and courage, not humiliation and grace.

—Rabbi Marc Gellman, First Things, May 1996

In the biblical text, the words “sin” and “fall” do not appear, but “expel” does occur. Expulsion is one phase of giving birth: the fetus is expelled from the mother’s body where all that is necessary for life has been provided. It is after the expulsion that life begins—work, exertion, and sexuality.

—Dorothee Solle, Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature (1993)

When Eve bit into the apple, she gave us the world as we know the world—beautiful, flawed, dangerous, full of being….Even the alienation from God we feel as a direct consequence of her Fall makes us beholden to her: The intense desire for God, never satisfied, arises from our separation from him. In our desire—this desire that makes us perfectly human—is contained in our celebration and our rejoicing. The mingling, melding, braiding of good and mischief in every human soul—the fusion of good and bad in intent and in art—is what makes us recognizable (and delicious) to one another; without it—without the genetically transmitted knowledge of good and evil that Eve’s act of radical curiosity sowed in our marrow—we should have no need of one another..., of a one and perfect Other. Eve’s legacy to us is the imperative to desire. Babies

and poems are born in travail of this desire, her great gift to the loveable world.

—Barbara Grizzuti Harrison, “A Meditation on Eve,” in Out of the Garden

# Rabbinic insights

Nechemiah, the son of Rabbi Sh’muel bar Nachman, said: “And it was very good” (Genesis 1.31). [The words in the verse that say] “and it was good” refer to the human beings. [Also, the words] “and it was good” refer to the Instinct-for-Good [הטוב יצר]. [The additional word] “And it was very good” refers to the Instinct-for-Bad [הרע יצר]. But is the Instinct-for-Bad very good?! In fact, this teaches you that without the Instinct-for-Bad, a man would not build a house, nor marry a woman, nor father children.

—Kohelet Rabbah 3:15

Rabbi Shimon says: Why did the Torah state, “When a man takes a woman [for marriage]” (Deut. 22.13; 24.1; 24.5) and did not write, “When a woman is taken to a man”? Because it is the way of a man to seek out a woman, but it is not the way of a woman to seek out a man. This can be compared to a person [אדם] who has lost an object—who looks for whom? The owner of the object seeks out what he has lost.

—BT Kiddushin 2b

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the universe, who made humanity in His own image, in the image and the likeness of His own form. And He established for him [the first man], out of himself, an everlasting structure [the first woman]. Blessed are You, Maker of humanity.

—Fourth Marriage Blessing

# The serpent and the punishment

### Umberto Cassuto

In this excerpt from his “A Commentary on the Book of Genesis,” Cassuto seeks to explain the “true” nature of the cunning serpent and then moves on to resolve the question of why God punishes all humankind for the sin of Adam and Eve.

The special characteristic that the Bible attributes to the serpent is cunning, and since it does not ascribe any other quality to him, it intends, apparently, to convey that the evil flowing from the serpent emanated only from his cunning.

In the ultimate analysis, we have here an allegorical allusion to the craftiness to be found in man himself. The man and his wife were, it is true, still devoid of comprehensive knowledge, like children who know neither good nor bad; but even those who lack wisdom sometimes possess slyness. The duologue between the serpent and the woman is actually, in a manner of speaking, a duologue that took place in the woman’s mind, between her wiliness and her innocence, clothed in the garb of a parable. Only in this way is it possible to understand the conversation clearly; otherwise it remains obscure….

In her cunning, the woman begins to think that possibly some inference can be drawn from the fact that the prohibition is restricted to a single tree. She asks herself: “Has God then forbidden us all the trees of the garden?”

“Surely not,” she answers herself in her simplicity; “He forbade us only the tree in the middle of the garden.”

“In that case,” she continues to argue in the manner of a sly person who considers herself extremely clever when she imputes cunning to other people and imagines that she has thereby discovered their secret intention, “in that case, just as the prohibition is restricted to this tree, so must the reason for it inhere in the nature of this tree, which bestows the knowledge of good and evil; undoubtedly, the interdict was not imposed upon us in order to preserve us from death, but because God, who knows good and evil, is jealous of us and does not wish us also to have knowledge of good and evil like Himself. On the basis of this conclusion, she acted as she did.

By interpreting the text in this way, we can understand why the serpent is said to think and speak; *in reality, it is not he that thinks and speaks, but the woman does so in her heart*. Thus we need not wonder at the serpent’s knowledge of the prohibition; it is the woman who is aware of it. Nor should we be surprised that he knows the purpose of the Lord God; it is the woman who imagines that she has plumbed the Divine intention—but is quite mistaken...!

In order to understand this Divine utterance as well as the subsequent address to the man, a few preliminary remarks are necessary. The decrees pronounced by the Lord God appear unduly severe: because Adam and his wife sinned was it right that their children and children’s children should be punished for all time? There is also another difficulty…: [I]f the man and his wife had hearkened to the voice of the Creator and been content with what He had given them, they could have eaten from the tree of life and lived forever in the garden of delight prepared for them? In that eventuality, they would have had no need, of course, to propagate their species or to spread abroad through the earth and fill it. Accepting this premise, there is a serious discrepancy between the preceding section and the present…, for it is distinctly stated in the story of creation (1:28): And God blessed them, and God said to them, “BE FRUITFUL AND MULTIPLY, AND FILL THE EARTH.”

However, I believe that this objection…can be clearly and convincingly answered, if we understand well the words addressed by the Lord God to the woman and to the man. This will enable us also to solve the first problem that we enunciated here, namely, the question of the

doom imposed by the Lord God upon the entire human race in consequence of the actions of the first man and his wife.

…[T]he Torah adopts the following method in describing the creation of the man and the woman: in the first section, it recounts very briefly, in conformity with the general plan of that section, the gist of the story in the final form that it assumed in the last stage of its unfoldment, to wit, male and female He created them; and in the second section, when reverting to the subject for the purpose of giving a full and detailed account, it portrays the course of events in all its successive phases to the very end.

The same procedure is followed in the present instance: in the first section, whose general structure prevents it from devoting more than a few sentences to man, only the last phase of the story is mentioned, the phase that determines, by the Divine blessing, mankind’s destiny for all generations; but when the Torah recapitulates the narrative in detail in this, the second section, it records each separate stage in the chain of events until the dénouement.

As far as the conclusion is concerned, the two sections accord well with one another. Since man chose the knowledge of good and evil, which involves mortality, preferring it to primitive simplicity, which is linked to eternal life, the Lord God acted towards him as a human father would to his dearly beloved little son, who did something contrary to his counsel, and thereby brought great harm upon himself. On the one hand, the father rebukes his son for not having followed his advice, and on the other hand, he endeavors to remedy the hurt that his son has done to himself by his action.

The decrees pronounced by the Lord God mentioned here are not exclusively punishments; they are also, and chiefly, measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation.

Immediately after eating of the fruit of the tree, they realized that it was not good to stand naked, and, for the time being, they sought relief in aprons of fig leaves. Needless to say, this was only a temporary palliative and inadequate for the future. Furthermore, when man went forth into the wide world, he was compelled to cover himself not only for reasons of modesty, but also on account of the cold and all the other natural phenomena that are injurious to human beings: and behold, the Lord God made for Adam and his wife garments of skin and clothed them (v. 21).

Even more essential was another ameliorative measure. Having lost the opportunity of achieving immortality, it was vital, in order to assure the survival of the human race, that man should be enabled to be fruitful and multiply; and so, indeed, the Lord God decreed. This reproductive capacity entails, indeed, pain and suffering for the woman, which would be her punishment for her transgression, as it is written: I will greatly multiply your suffering, especially of your childbearing: in pain you shall bring forth children.

In pain, it is true, but you shall bring forth children, and that, ultimately, is what matters most.

This is at once the benison of fertility and the assurance of the continued existence of the species, a promise that begins to be realized immediately, as it is said (4.1): Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, etc.

There was still a third measure necessary: the provision of sustenance. In the garden of Eden, man maintained himself without difficulty; the soil of the garden was irrigated by the water of the river, without any need for rain, and he had only to stretch forth his hand and gather fruit from the trees, according to his requirements.

When he was banished from the garden and went forth into the wide world, which could not be sufficiently fructified by well-water and rivers, the blessing of rain, which gives to the earth its fertility, came into force.

It is true that the bringing forth of bread from the ground demands intensive toil on the part of man, which would be his punishment for his sin; it is true that rain cannot always be depended upon—a factor that is to be employed by God for requiting man according to the good or evil of his deeds. However, the possibility of obtaining sustenance was afforded him. In toil you shall eat of it: verily in toil, yet you will at least eat of it. And you shall eat of the grain of the field: Granted it is only the grain of the field, but at all events you will eat. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread: truly in the sweat of your face; nevertheless, you shall eat bread. In this case, too, in the final analysis, it is the positive outcome that is of primary importance.

According to this interpretation, it would appear that the rabbinic comment that all that is here related concerning the man took place on the very day that he was created, agrees with the actual meaning of the text, for it is stated above (1.28–29) that the blessings of fertility and sustenance were bestowed on the sixth day. There is not a single word in the passage that contradicts this hypothesis: on the contrary, it is possible that the expression היום לרוח [*l’ruach ha-yom*; “in the afternoon”] contains, as we have explained, an allusion to the fact that the whole drama was enacted on the same day.

# On Adam, Eve, and the Serpent

### by Elaine H. Pagels

In the essay that follows, Professor Elaine H. Pagels invites us to consider how different faiths have interpreted the story of temptation in different eras, including our own. She also discusses how our thinking on a wide range of issues and concerns has been affected by this story, from whether we have the freedom to choose between good and evil to what the “correct” relationship should be between men and women.

The story of Adam, Eve, and the serpent, written down about 3,000 years ago and probably told for generations before that, derives from one of the most ancient sources in the Hebrew Bible. Unlike the grand cosmological creation account that precedes it in Genesis 1, the temptation story reads like a folktale, with its story of a man formed from earth, a woman made out of his body, a talking snake, a mysterious prohibition violated with disastrous consequences. Yet because it articulates values fundamental to our culture—values that still matter to us— Jews, Christians, and Muslims continue to read it even today, as a story that speaks to the human condition.

Woven into the story are questions that resonate as urgently now as they did thousands of years ago: What is the appropriate relationship between God and humankind? Between men and women? Why do we work so hard—and with such frustration? Why do we suffer? And why do we die?

Many who read Genesis 2 and 3 intuitively recognize that the story bears not only religious implications, but enormous practical ones. The episode that begins with Eve emerging from Adam’s body and ends with the man and woman reuniting into “one flesh,” for example, has traditionally been taken as instituting marriage. This episode concludes with the comments “For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh”—words that rabbis in ancient times turned into a code of sexual conduct.

Rabbi Eleazar (ca. 90 C.E.) took the first phrase to mean not only that a man must not marry his mother, but also that he must not marry “her who is related to his father and mother” within the degrees prohibited as incest. Rabbi Akiva (ca. 135 C.E.) took the phrase “and cleave to his wife” to mean, in his words, “But not to his neighbor’s wife, nor to a male, nor to an animal,” thus rejecting adultery, homosexuality and bestiality. Like Eleazar and Akiva, Jesus of Nazareth (ca. 30 C.E.), when asked about grounds for divorce, answered by invoking both Genesis creation accounts—although his answer, ruling out divorce (Mark 10.2-12) or severely limiting it (Matthew 19.9), clashed with those his contemporaries [the tamudic Sages] gave.

Should people today who accept Genesis as scripture follow—or challenge—ancient interpretations? Even in ancient times, among Jews and among Christians, interpretation of Genesis varied enormously. Paul of Tarsus (later known as St. Paul), for example, a convert from Judaism to Christianity, argues at one point that women are naturally subordinate to men because, as he infers from the story of Eve’s “birth” from Adam, “man was not made from woman, but woman from man ... and for man” (I Corinthians 11.8-9). In following generations, Christians fiercely debated what Paul’s reading of Genesis meant. Certain followers of Paul actually composed and attributed to Paul “letters” that even exaggerated the patriarchal elements in Paul’s letter, with such words as these, written in I Timothy:

Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet a woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty (2.11-15).

Many scholars agree that the unknown author of I Timothy was using Paul’s name to oppose Christian groups in which women did speak, teach, and wield authority. I Timothy also argues against radical Christians who believed that the sin of Adam and Eve was sexual—that the forbidden “fruit of the Tree of Knowledge” conveyed, above all, carnal knowledge. Such Christians insisted that only those who “undo the sin of Adam and Eve” by practicing celibacy— even within marriage—truly follow the gospel. But those who came to predominate within the majority of churches rejected this claim and agreed with their Jewish contemporaries that marriage and procreation are “cooperation with God in the work of creation.” Many Jews and Christians today invoke Genesis 2 and 3 in discussions concerning homosexual relationships.

Others, however, insist the sin of Adam and Eve was not sexual indulgence…, but disobedience. Thus read, the temptation story communicates other values…—above all, a vision of humanity endowed with moral freedom and moral responsibility. During the first three centuries of the common era, both Jews and Christians agreed that the central point of the story is that we are responsible for the choices we freely make, good or evil, just as Adam and Eve were. Throughout the ages, Jewish teachers have explained that each person’s “knowledge of good and evil”—capacity for moral decision—involves conflict between two impulses contending within us: one good, the other evil. The evil impulse, some suggest, is not so much wicked as aggressive, self-aggrandizing, pleasure-seeking….[See Nechemiah above.]

Some Christians, however, later interpreted the story in a far more radical way. The renowned Christian teacher Augustine, writing in the fourth century, went so far as to insist that Adam’s sin so infected the human capacity for moral choice that we no longer can choose not to sin.

Augustine suggested that Adam’s sins irrevocably changed human nature so that our natural human inclinations impel us to sin. This pessimistic view of human nature has been challenged ever since Augustine proposed it. It diverges sharply from Jewish teachings that emphasize human responsibility for good and evil. Yet for countless Christians influenced by Augustine, both Catholic and Protestant, the story of Adam and Eve has become virtually synonymous with “original sin.”

Finally the story raises questions about our relationship with the divine:

What about the anthropomorphic picture of God as one who shaped Adam from earth and breathed life into his nostrils?

To whom is God speaking when he says that “the man and woman have become like one of us” (Genesis 3.22)?

Why does the Lord prohibit the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge?

How is it that it is the serpent, not the Lord, who accurately foretells the consequences of sin?

Was God surprised and disappointed by his human creatures (as Genesis 6.6 suggests)?

Did Adam and Eve actually “[hear] the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Genesis 3.8)?

Details that may delight storytellers often trouble theologians. To this day, where some see the picture of a protective and caring divine Father, others have seen a ruler jealous of his prerogatives, who inflicts harsh suffering on his creatures to punish their curiosity. Such questions spurred many readers—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—toward non-literal and even mystical readings of Genesis.

Even those who do not take the story literally, then, may take it seriously, engaging it to focus discussion as each of us clarifies our relationship—various as these may be—to the issues it raises. Through the process of interpreting, the readers’ living experiences come to be woven into ancient texts, so that what might otherwise be “dead letter” again comes to life.

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# On Temptation

### by Robert Coles

At the very beginning of human history, the serpent told us that knowledge was good, knowledge was power, and, even though we quickly learned how high a price we might have to pay for it, knowledge we have desired and knowledge we have pursued ever since. “There is only one good, knowledge,” Socrates said. “Knowledge enormous makes a God of me,” Keats concurred more than 2,000 years later. But child psychiatrist Robert Coles suggests that knowledge alone is not enough to make us fully human, never mind godlike.

The serpent that tempted Adam and Eve, that tempted our forebears after them, still attends us, prompts and prods us, invites us, entrances us: Come, be more than you already are, and do so quite naturally—by affirming and pursuing capabilities already yours. Like Adam and Eve, we are special among the earth’s creatures—the one whom the Lord addressed, the one graced with language and understanding, the visionary one, endowed with ambition and curiosity, whose abilities, ironically, have from the start been the source of thorough jeopardy.

What the serpent told Eve, promised her—that she and Adam shall be as gods (and with no consequent or subsequent danger of punishment from the Lord—is what we human beings have been telling ourselves ever since: knowledge and more knowledge ought to be our desire, and its acquisition will bring us a kind of divinity, the power, the control, the authority that goes with such understanding. Our history has amounted to a pursuit of that understanding and, indeed, the result has been the unparalleled command over nature made possible by our scientific achievements—with more of them, we are sure, around every generational corner.

Yet our history also has given us no reprieve from our mean and murderous side, no matter all we have learned about atoms and molecules, about chemical reactions, about the unconscious and its workings. A century that has given us a hugely knowing science also has given us nuclear bombs, the technology that enabled mass slaughter in concentration camps, and, yes, the gossip and malice, the slanders and spite that one not rarely finds in university campuses or among psychiatrists and psychoanalysts trained to fathom the mind.

Such ironies won’t let go of us. Ezra Pound’s enormous erudition, his great talent as a poet, did not give him any immunity from cheap, crude hate. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s brilliant, learned philosophical discoveries gave him no immunity from a self-serving complicity with the Nazi murderers to whom he truckled. Doctors and engineers and ministers and priests and lawyers and professors signed up with Hitler and Stalin, did their dirty work. Honorable altruists, who have proven to be beyond the temptation of accommodation to brute political power, like our Dietrich Bonhoeffers, our Raoul Wallenbergs, alas, have been the exception, not the rule. To this day, we celebrate not moral intelligence, but cognitive intelligence and now “maturity” (whatever that is): the very bright, the solid and sound, the “well- adjusted” (to what, though?).

In Genesis 3, we are told that an intellect unheedful of the oughts and naughts set down by the Creator, a prideful intellect that casts aside moral authority, will come to ruin again and again. That story has to this day been our story. When Emerson warned us that “character is higher than intellect,” he was addressing Genesis 3—the narrative and moral essence of which is the high cost of egoism, of a striving disobedience that goes ethically unscrutinized. Nothing in today’s world suggests that the moral tragedy that Genesis describes, that Emerson found so worrying, is in any way less a presence among us now, for all our achievements.

That biblical curse continues to be our daily challenge—how to tame our restless intelligence with humility.

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# The Beginning of Wisdom, Chapter 3

### Leon R. Kass

The stories in Genesis “show the great dangers of male domination and exploitation of women,” Kass argues in this chapter. The Garden of Eden is meant to overcome that. “The coming of God’s preferred new way, begun with Abraham, seeks a decisive shift in the uninstructed or natural male attitude toward woman,” and this shift is already noticeable in Genesis Chapters 2 and 3. “Judaism partakes heavily not only of domestication,” he says, “but also of what could once be called (not by its friends) feminization.”

### THE VEXED QUESTION OF MAN AND WOMAN

Anyone interested in the anthropology of the Bible starts by studying the story of the first human beings, living in the Garden of Eden….The primary story of our humanity is necessarily a story also about man and woman….

What are they, and why—each alone and both together? How are they alike, and how different? How much is difference due to nature, how much to culture? What difference does—and should—the difference make? What do men want of women, or women of men? What should they want? Do they really need each other? If so, why? What is the meaning of sexuality, natural and human? Which beliefs, customs, and institutions governing sexuality best promote human flourishing?

These very basic questions, today the subject of much talk and controversy, are in fact very old….The Bible has much to say on the subject, both descriptive and prescriptive, and Genesis itself has numerous stories that make vivid the complexity of human sexual relations.

As with other matters, the first story provides the pattern…It is descriptive rather than prescriptive: it does not offer a moral teaching on human sexuality; neither does it present a picture of the ideal relation between man and woman. Rather, it illuminates the fundamental and universal features of human sexuality, the nature of man and woman, and the natural bases of their complicated relationship….As we will do throughout our reading of Genesis, we look into the mirror provided by this story to see if it enhances our self-understanding and, conversely, if our experience lends credence to the truths conveyed by the tale….

### SEXUAL DIFFERENCE: THE LOVE OF ONE’S OWN

[T]he basic level of human life is [first] displayed through the portrait of the solitary human being, at home in the garden, tending to his own elementary needs. The coming of woman embodies a new dimension of our humanity, comprising augmented powers of reason, speech, and self-awareness, and (as we will now see) genuine sociality rooted in sexual difference and attraction—all in one package.

Man’s difference from the animals is not just a matter of rationality; it is decisively a matter of sexual self-awareness. All higher animals are sexual beings, but only man knows it. Sexual self-consciousness separates man from the animal or childlike way of life, represented by the solitary human being who is featured at the start of this story. But sexual self-awareness is no simple matter, because human sexuality is highly complex; the complications in our sexuality, in fact, arise largely from aspects in sexual desire that depend on our becoming conscious of it.

…[H]uman sexuality comprises at least three distinct, and sometimes competing, natural elements. We meet these elements one by one in the Garden of Eden story, as it takes us through three separate “stages” in the emergence of human sexual awareness, each stage illuminating a distinct aspect of sexuality: the (animal) sex act; its humanization through concerns for attraction and esteem; and its deeper, procreative meaning.

Each sexual element has its correlative aspect of erotic desire: need love, appreciative love, and generative love….

To prepare him for his appropriate counterpart, man’s desire for company is stimulated by encountering the animals….As man’s powers of perception illuminate also his apartness and aloneness, his approach to the animals reflects his need for another and excites his latent powers of desire.

Few readers will wish to deny that the trial run with the animals served to stimulate the man’s desire for a counterpart….But as the sequel makes plain, the desire here aroused is almost certainly sexual….God creates the desired counterpart out of man himself….The necessary answer to the problem of man’s aloneness, the duality of man and woman, is produced from within. As a result of the surgery, the original human being is no longer what he was: he is no longer whole. His original and amorphous stirrings of restlessness (freedom? loneliness? ambition? fear?) are, as we shall see, to be replaced by focused desire.

Some critics see in this account of woman’s origin evidence that the text is sexist…, [b]ut the text even more readily supports an opposite view. For one thing, the man’s origin was lower, from the dust; the woman begins from already living flesh and, moreover, from flesh taken close to the heart. Also, the man is, in the process, rendered less than whole; he suffers a permanent but invisible wound, signifying a deep and probably unfulfillable desire. Because he is incomplete and knows it, the man will always be looking for something he lacks; but…the man cannot really know what is missing or what the sought-for wholeness would really be.

Male erotic desire is a conundrum: it wants and wants ardently, but it is unsure of what exactly would fully satisfy it. In contrast, the woman…is presumably not in any way deformed or incomplete. Indeed…, [she] is created not with a deficiency but with an excess, an overflowing capacity for generating new life. Besides—and this is surely the most important response—the difference in man’s and woman’s origins betokens not a matter of rank or status, but a difference in the character of primordial male and female desire….

In [analyzing], in the last chapter, [the] first human sentence, we [note] that it is a poetic speech of pent-up desire (“This one at last”). [Also], from the names he here gives to the woman and to himself, [‘*ish* and ‘*isha*] we note] that the appearance of woman makes man feel his masculinity, which is to say, his desire for her….[In] the explanation he gives for her name, [we see] how he is defining her in light of his possessive desire. Let us now look more closely at this speech….

The first thing to notice is the corporeal character of the man’s description of woman, a clue to the carnal character of his desire. To him, she is fleshy and bony, not brainy or soulful. To be sure, flesh and bone could be read symbolically, as a metaphor for the person or the soul. But he does not speak to her, as soulmate or conversation partner—he does not say, “You are bone of my bone”—but about her, as object of appetite. Moreover, throughout the sequel, the language remains unrelievedly physical. In addition…, the man, his vision clouded by his desire, looks upon the woman as an extension of himself, indeed, as his possession….The first expression of desire is felt as the love of one’s own, more precisely, the love of one’s own flesh. The first element of love is, or appears to be, literally selfish: the other appears lovable because it is regarded as same, because it is or seems to be oneself. This love seeks merging, reunion, fusion, as the text, interrupting the narration, says: “Therefore a man [‘*ish*] leaves his father and his mother and cleaves unto his woman: *that they may become as one flesh*” (2.24; emphasis added).

…The speech of desire was the speech of the man: indeed…, he identifies himself as a male human being, possessively eyeing his female counterpart. What the woman thought of all this we are not told. What about her desire? Were her feelings mutual or symmetrical? We do not know; but there is some reason to doubt it. Indeed, the different origin of man and woman, and the origin of woman from man’s flesh and bone, may be literary vehicles for suggesting and communicating basic natural differences between male and female sexual desire.

If males as males want possessive cleaving and fusing, what do females want? If male desire is naturally focused on woman, what is the heart’s desire of woman as female?

Anyone who does not want to be self-deceived about these important matters would certainly want to consider, without prejudice, whether male and female desire are, to begin with (that is, by nature, before culture takes over), symmetrical and even identical….I am inclined to think that the asymmetry may be real and deep, especially if we think of sex and sexual difference in an evolutionary context….For, evolutionarily speaking, sexual desire serves and is selected for reproductive success. Thus, although man— like all the other mammals—experiences lust without realizing its connection to generation of offspring, the character of his lusting would certainly be conditioned by its relation to that outcome or goal….

Whatever might be the case about sex differences in sexual desire, there is…no difference regarding consciousness of desire: it is virtually absent. Desire is experienced, desire energizes, desire is satisfied—and it is, as the sexually liberated now say, no big deal. Lust comes naturally (what could be bad?): “and they were both naked, the man [‘*adam*] and his woman [‘*ishto*], and were not ashamed” (2.25). Such lack of shame, too, is natural, as shamelessness is with all the other animals. Sexual self-consciousness is still a thing of the future; likewise, all matters of moral judgment. For now, just fuse and be glad.

### JUDGMENT, SHAME, AND ADORNMENT:

**FROM LUST TO LOVE OF THE BEAUTIFUL BELOVED**

The next aspect of the relationship between man and woman depends on the presence of judgmental self-consciousness, which depends in turn on the possession of ideas about good and bad. We have considered how conversation between the serpent and the woman generated the requisite self-knowledge. But we ignored the sexual dimensions of the exchange. Why, for example, does the serpent approach the woman rather than the man? Could her susceptibility to his wily and subversive speech be related to her feminine state of soul?

Tradition, in fact, has come down hard on the woman, and misogynists have frequently used her role in the transgression to anchor or justify their belief in the inferiority and weakness of women. But if we wish to let the text teach us about man and woman, we must try to ignore all latter-day commentary and its harsh negative judgment on woman’s deed….Considering not morality and sin but only psychology and anthropology, we are compelled to notice that it is woman’s soul that carries the germ of human ascent. The woman’s dialogue with the serpent shows that it is she, not the man, who is open to conversation, who imagines new possibilities, who reaches for improvement….[T]he woman is more open to the world—to beauty and to the possibility of wisdom. She, in short, has more than sex on the brain. Her aspirations…are the first specifically human longings. Precisely because her *eros* is less focused and less carnal, it can grow wings and fly. The man, who did (as he has so often done since) what was pleasing to woman, speechlessly followed her lead into disobedience or, to say the same thing, into humanity (3:6). 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), a discovery made not indifferently but with passing judgment:

*And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. (3.7)*

The serpent had promised, “Your eyes shall be opened and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and bad” (3.5). But as the biblical speaker points out, with irony, their eyes were opened instead to the knowledge of their nakedness, which now becomes a source of shame and distress. Before, they were naked, but being innocent and ignorant, they were not ashamed (2.25). Now they see things as they really are: they do more than observe what had hitherto escaped notice; they now know the meaning of what had merely been seen.

Irony notwithstanding, we must ponder the suggestion that the first major discovery of the human mind is a truth about the human body.

We must take seriously the notion that the beginning of moral knowledge or the beginning of human wisdom is, in truth, an awareness of the meaning of nakedness. What is nakedness? Why does awareness of it induce shame? How does this awareness and our response to it alter the relationship between man and woman?

To be naked means, of course, to be unguarded and exposed—a sign of our vulnerability before the elements and the beasts. But the text makes us attend, as did our ancient forebears, to our sexuality. In looking, as it were, for the first time upon our bodies as sexual beings, we discover how far we are from anything divine. More concretely, we discover, first, our own incompleteness and lack of wholeness, both without and within. We have need for, and are dependent upon, a complementary yet different other, even to realize or satisfy our bodily nature. We learn that sex means that we are halves, not wholes, and, worse, that we do not command the missing complementary half….

Moreover, we are not internally whole, but divided. We are possessed by an unruly or rebellious autonomous sexual nature within—one that does not heed our commands (any more than we heeded God’s); we face also, within, an ungovernable and disobedient element, which embarrasses our claim to self-command. We are made aware of powerful impulses whose true import we don’t understand, precisely because they are recognizably different from the more basic and strictly self-serving desires for food, drink and rest, with their strictly private satisfactions. We are compelled to submit to the mastering desire within and to the wiles of its objects without; and in surrender, we lay down our pretense of upright lordliness….Our nascent pride, born of reflection, is embarrassed by the way we need and are needed by the sexual other….

Finally, all this noticing is itself problematic. For in turning our attention inward, we manifest…the difficulty of self-consciousness itself. For a peculiarly human doubleness is present in the soul,through which we self-consciously scrutinize ourselves, seeing ourselves as others see us. We are no longer assured of the spontaneous, immediate, unself-conscious participation in life, experienced with a whole heart and a soul undivided against itself.

Worse, self-consciousness is not only corrosive and obstructive; it is also judgmental…. [W]e care about whether we measure up to our own idealized self-image and we look anxiously to others for their assessment of our worthiness. When we see ourselves being seen by the other, we cannot hide from ourselves the painful awareness of our own inadequacies and weaknesses. We are ashamed….

Sexual attraction is now suffused with a concern for approbation and a fear of rejection….But, strangely, the discovery of unfreedom is freely made and partly liberating. If there can be refusal, there can also be acceptance. A new dimension of freedom—with momentous consequences—alters the sexual necessity. Each seeks no longer mere submission, but willing submission; each seeks to win not just the body but especially the heart of the other. Each partner seeks approval, praise, respect, esteem—perhaps, at first, as a means of securing sexual satisfaction, but soon enough as an end in itself….

And yet, the friendship of the lovers remains inherently problematic: on the one hand, there is difference, dependence, and demand; on the other hand, the wish for approbation earned and freely given, despite the unattractiveness of sexual neediness. This tension, sometimes recognized, often not, energizes human eros and raises it to new possibilities.

The animals, too, are naked, but they know no shame….Human beings do not take their shame lying down:

*And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves girdles. (3.7)*

Sexual shame becomes the mother of invention, art, and new modes of cooperative sociality: note well, it is not the woman alone who sews. If the needle is the first tool, clothing is the first product, and hiding is the first goal of art. Clothing, a human addition to nature, at first hides the sexual from view. An obstacle is symbolically presented to immediate gratification of lust.

Moreover, clothing not only covers over or dissimulates ugliness; it also adorns and beautifies. It thus allows the imagination to embellish and love to grow in the space provided by the restraint placed upon lust, a restraint opened by shame and ratified by covering it up. When, in the presence of love, clothing is eventually removed, the mutual and willing exposure of sexual nakedness will be understood by each partner as a gift to one’s beloved and will be received gladly and without contempt….

[R]eturning to our text, we discover another new possibility that is also now open to the lovers—if they are not so self-absorbed that they are unable to attend. Right after they make themselves girdles, the man and the woman show their first real openness to or awareness of the divine. Immediately after clothing their nakedness, reports the biblical author, “they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden” (3.8). Human beings, once awakened to their neediness and insufficiency, have reason to pay attention to higher possibilities. Provided that the lovers do not repose their love and longing solely with each other, their eros can turn them toward the divine and the immortal.

### GENEROUS LOVE: PROCREATION

…Beyond desire for bodily union and beyond erotic love and romance, the meaning of man and woman has much to do with children, whether we know it or not. This aspect of the story of man and woman—and especially our awareness of it —gravely complicates the picture, introducing further new prospects, on the one hand, for divergence and conflict, and on the other hand, for unification and harmony. Let’s take the bad news first.

The capacity to bear children is, to say the least, a mixed blessing for the woman….Human childbirth is painful mainly because of the disproportion between the child’s large human head and the mother’s relatively small birth canal. The human capacity for reason and freedom, embraced in the transgressive rise to humanhood and embodied in the enlarged cranium, is, at its source, in conflict with mere nature; and it comes at heavy bodily cost to the woman, indeed, often with risk to her very life. Furthermore, this bodily conflict between the mother and her emergent child anticipates the often much more painful act of separation, when the child, exercising the newly awakened mental powers made possible by his large head, reaches for his own autonomous knowledge of good and bad and repeats the original rise and fall from obedience and innocence in the ever- recurring saga of human freedom and enlightenment.

But second, the fact of maternity also brings with it, quite naturally, new, unequal, and potentially difficult relations between woman and man. How is this to be understood? What are we to make of the vexed passage “Your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you”? Most readers agree that it signifies the institution of patriarchy….[S]ome Christian traditionalists, blaming womanly weakness for man’s loss of paradise, defend patriarchy as just and necessary: they attribute it to God’s will, regard it as His fitting punishment of woman’s disobedience….In contrast, some contemporary feminists denounce patriarchy as arbitrary and unjust: because of this passage (among others), they claim that the Bible is a sexist text, written by males to justify the domineering ways of man toward woman….

But such readers read thoughtlessly and often tendentiously. They do not stop to consider that God’s speech might be predictive rather than prescriptive, that it expresses not so much His preference for how things should be, but rather, as I would suggest, His prophecy about how things necessarily will be. They do not reflect, philosophically, on possible reasons for why the husband’s rule over the wife might be necessary or desirable or just plain inevitable.

And in interpreting the remark about male rule, they ignore its local context and its most important element: the new fact, just announced, that woman will give birth. How might the idea “Your desire shall be to your husband and he shall rule over you” follow from childbirth and procreation? Can her special reproductive nature—not her alleged willfulness or independent- mindedness—explain both woman’s desire for her man and his rule over her?

Woman, burdened naturally by pregnancy and nursing, burdened longer than females of other species because of the lengthy period of gestation and the still lengthier period of dependency of human infants, has trouble going it alone. More attached both bodily and psychically to nascent and newborn life, she feels sooner, more acutely, and more powerfully than does the man an attachment to her own young. Paradoxically, her focused love for her children causes her desire also for her husband—as their father—to grow more focused and more intense. Whereas, as lustful, man looked fixedly at woman (any woman?) as his missing bodily half, woman, as generative, turns her broader desire on her particular husband as protector of and provider for her children, and as partner in their rearing….

How to gain the male’s cooperation and permanent presence? How to domesticate him? A man who rules—or appears to rule—gets domestic authority in exchange for serving the needs of the woman and her children. Or, equally likely, once woman attaches herself to him and domesticates him, man may simply take power, being physically stronger. To be sure, this is not a matter of conscious scheming or explicit contract. Rather, human nature itself as generative might conspire and beguile in this direction, arranging things in this new, more permanent, and seemingly hierarchical way. But regardless of how this comes about, once children are present and the human family comes into being, the equality of man and woman as unencumbered lovers yields to division of labor and the hierarchy of social relations and institutions.

But there is a further reason why the institution of stable domestic arrangements for rearing the young depends on some form of man’s rule over woman. If woman as mother needs the provision and protection of man, so man as father needs the restraint of woman. Pregnant woman or nursing mother may be physically weaker than her man, but her procreative capacity in fact gives her unique power in the household. Not only does she alone have life-bearing power; she alone also determines paternity and lineage. Maternity is never in doubt, paternity is rarely without it…: a man’s own legitimacy depends entirely on the marital chastity of his mother; the legitimacy of his putative progeny depends entirely on the sexual fidelity of his wife. No man is likely to accept the domestic role of fatherly protector and provider for a woman’s children unless he can be reasonably confident that those children are his own.

And no social order interested in its long-term future can be indifferent to the need for responsible fatherhood. For these reasons especially, the institution of family life is likely to require some form of male rule, especially over the exercise of female sexuality. Establishing a human household requires limiting both male independence and female sexuality.

The institution of households and ordered family life, though necessary as the nursery of humanity, is hardly trouble free….[T]he institution of rule itself carries with it, inevitably, the likelihood of inequality and, hence, the possibility of much greater conflict: on one side insensitivity and abuse of power, on the other side abasement, envy, and resentment….[R]ule and power very often corrupt; and in any case, distinction and inequality related to children and domesticity threaten always to mar the bliss of the happy lovers, previously indifferent to their generative telos.

Subsequent stories in Genesis will indeed show the great dangers of male domination and exploitation of women. For example, we will…witness with revulsion Lot’s [attempt at] sacrificing his daughters to the Sodomites (19.8) or the Hivite prince’s rape of Dinah (34.2). Indeed, as I will later argue, the coming of God’s preferred new way, begun with Abraham, seeks a decisive shift in what I am calling the uninstructed or natural male attitude toward woman.

Judaism partakes heavily not only of domestication, but also of what could once be called (not by its friends) feminization. Yet the possibility of such softening is, in fact, naturally grounded. Indeed, as our present text shows, it rests on an utterly spontaneous male reaction to news of the new dispensation.

The end of God’s speech to the woman, “and he shall rule over you,” leads God to turn next to ‘*adam*, the being who just learned of his future position as ruler. The report is hardly cheering….

God addresses the man not as ruler, but as ruled: man, ruled internally by his desire for woman, had submitted externally to her voice. Lustful man willingly exchanged a life of innocent simplicity, in obedience to God’s command, for a life burdened by shame-filled self-division, in obedience to the siren song of free choice and worldly pleasure. Even if he subsequently gains rule in the household, man now knows that he is hardly a ruler; on the contrary, his choice for independence makes him like a slave who must work and serve the earth, in order to eke out a living for himself and his family. Woman periodically will suffer painful labor, but man will labor painfully all the days of his life. His portion is sorrow, sweat, toil, and death: the dusty earth opposes his needs, resists his plow, and finally devours him whole. Despite all his efforts, his labors are unavailing; in the end, he returns to his beginning, the ground from which he was taken. The new ruler has no reason to revel in his new trappings of office—not least because he soon will have many mouths to feed. The procreative meaning of sex has heavy consequences also for the man.

Man’s immediate response is reported in one of the most beautiful and moving sentences of the entire Torah:

*And the man called his wife’s name Eve [*Chavah*], because she was the mother of all living [*chai*]. (3:20)*

The man hears the prophecy of hardship and trouble and death, the evils that he unwittingly purchased with his enlightenment, but he does not despair. Despite having his nose rubbed in the truth that he can achieve no more than a return to his earthy and dusty beginnings, the man looks instead to a promising future. Guided by one glimmer in God’s speech to the woman, the soul-saving passion of hope fixes his mind on the singular piece of good news: “My God! She is going to bear children!” Woman alone carries the antidote to disaster—the prospect of life, ever renewable. With revelational clarity, the man sees the woman in yet another new light, this time truly: not just as flesh to be joined, not just as another to impress and admire, but as a generous, generating, and creative being, with powers he can only look up to in awe, gratitude, and very likely a good dose of envy (a point to which I shall return).

Despite the forecast of doom, man’s soul is lifted by the redemptive and overflowing powers of woman. He names her anew, this time with no reference to himself: only now, at last, is she known as Eve, source of life and hope. This, far more than the burdensome promise of rule, can attach the man devotedly to the woman. Children, a good now common to each, can hold together and harmonize what sexual differentiation sometimes threatens to drive apart….

The primordial story of man and woman thus points (descriptively and prophetically) forward to the household, to that first institution of humanity, devoted finally to rearing the next generation. As Rousseau would put it centuries later, describing this aspect of nascent humanity:

The first developments of the heart were the effect of a new situation, which united husbands and wives, fathers and children, in a common habitation. The habit of living together gave rise to the sweetest sentiments known to man: conjugal love and paternal love. Each family became a little society all the better united because reciprocal affection and freedom were its only bonds.

The relationship between man and woman, now united around their common children, takes on new coloring. Conjugal love, the love of man and woman as husband and wife and especially as father and mother, goes well beyond both animal lust and erotic passion. Its joys, claims Rousseau, are sweeter than any other.

Yet the innocence of this picture, though genuine, is partial and misleading. There are seeds of future trouble in the division of labor, difficulties that Rousseau, in fact, highlights in the immediate sequel:

.. and it was then that the first difference was established in the way of life of the two sexes, which until this time had had but one. Women became more sedentary and grew accustomed to tend the hut and the children, while the men went to seek their common subsistence. [Note that Rousseau describes the situation from the man’s point of view: he refers to paternaI love, not parental love. His point is that only domestication produces in men the love for children that women feel immediately and altogether naturally. The mother-child bond is fully natural; the father-child bond must he cultivated.]

Even more worrisome, many men will not take easily to domestication and family life. Not only will they treasure their independence and shun responsibility; they will not see in fatherhood the vehicle for realizing their highest aspirations….He will thus be inclined to look elsewhere for his share in immortality. Envy of woman’s fertility may compound his discontent and can spur his ambition for achievements that have nothing to do with procreation and family life: the pursuit of power, dominion, and (especially) glory in battle.

Fertile woman, as mother of all living, carries within herself life’s answer to mortality; but martial man, as heroic dispenser of death to those who intend his own, gains for himself his own deathless name. The naming of Eve with no reference to himself signals not only unselfish appreciation but also self-concerned estrangement and fear of anonymity: if he is to obtain a proper name, the man will have to earn it by his deeds.

The implications of these difficulties become thematic in the subsequent tales in Genesis; controversies springing from them trouble us to the present day, and most likely will continue to do so indefinitely. Still, these troubles notwithstanding, one sees in generative love and its attendant institution, family life, the basis for the deepest union of man and woman, and the one toward which sexuality as such surely points.

The tale of the Garden of Eden can hardly be called a success story, nor is the new, familial dispensation a simple or sufficient remedy. Parental interest in children is not always wholesome, and neither are the children. Indeed, when we finish the story of prototypical man and woman—which does not end with their expulsion from Eden but continues through the story of their children in the next chapter—we will discover immediately the dangers of woman’s pride in her childbearing powers and of jealous sibling rivalry to the point of fratricide. Throughout the book of Genesis, we will see troubled families and the trouble families cause, even as the family principle is endorsed and even sanctified. There is parental favoritism (Isaac for Esau, Rebekah for Jacob), more sibling rivalry (Rachel and Leah, Joseph and his brothers), and filial rebellion (Ham toward Noah). And even in the best case, Abraham’s pride in his firstborn must be circumcised in the covenant, and his love for the long-awaited Isaac must be subordinated to his reverence for the Lord—precisely to prove that he is fit to be the father of his people. Yet it will be the miraculously delivered promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah—and God’s refusal to allow his sacrifice—that completes Abraham’s initiation into the way of God. Rightly understood, the love of one’s own children and the love of the divine go hand in hand….

To this point we have been proceeding anthropologically, reading descriptively rather than prescriptively, looking into the mirror of the text to discover permanent aspects of our humanity as gendered, erotic, and engendering beings.

Thanks to seeing the moral ambiguity of our sexual proclivities, we are better prepared to understand our permanent dilemmas in being man and woman. But is there no positive moral teaching about man and woman in this story? Does not our human nature, here disclosed, point toward some answers regarding better and worse? Given my principles of reading—namely, that what we have here is realistic description rather than idealistic prescription—I hesitate to suggest any normative conclusions. Nevertheless, remembering that pointings are not prescriptions, I think the story may very well point to the following encouraging suggestions.

The primordial story of man and woman hints that, despite all the dangers that accompany the humanization of sexuality, it is complementarity—the heterosexual difference—and not just doubleness that may point the way to human flourishing altogether. Conscious love of the complementary other draws the soul outward and upward; in procreation, love, mindful of mortality, overflows generously into creativity, the child unifying the parents as sex or romance alone never can; and the desire to give not only life but a good way of life to their children opens both man and woman toward a concern for the true, the good, and the holy.

Parental love of children may be the beginning of the sanctification of life. Perhaps that is what God was thinking when He said that it is not good for the human being—neither for man nor for woman—to be alone. Perhaps this is why “male and female created He them” (1.27).