

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 Gentiles and most 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 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 [יצר הטוב]. [The additional word] "And it was very good" refers to the Instinct-for-Bad [יצר הרע]. 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

In re 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, forsooth, 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 (iv 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 לרוח היום [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.

Satan's fall and Eve's side of the story

A Midrashic compilation

Louis Jacobs

The extraordinary qualities with which Adam was blessed, physical and spiritual as well, aroused the envy of the angels. They attempted to consume him with fire, and he would have perished, had not the protecting hand of God rested upon him, and established peace between him and the heavenly host.

In particular, Satan was jealous of the first man, and his evil thoughts finally led to his fall.

After Adam had been endowed with a soul, God invited all the angels to come and pay him reverence and homage. Satan, the greatest of the angels in heaven, with 12 wings, instead of six like all the others, refused to pay heed to the behest of God, saying, "You created us angels from the splendor of the Shechinah, and now You command us to cast ourselves down before the creature which You fashioned out of the dust of the ground!"

God answered, "Yet this 'dust of the ground' has more wisdom and understanding than you."

Satan demanded a trial of wit with Adam, and God assented thereto, saying: "I have created beasts, birds, and reptiles. I shall have them all come before you and before Adam. If you are able to give them names, I shall command Adam to show honor unto you, and you shall rest next to the Shechinah of My glory. But if not, and Adam calls them by the names I have assigned to them, then you will be subject to Adam, and he shall have a place in My garden, and cultivate it."

Thus spoke God, and He took Himself to Paradise, Satan following Him. When Adam beheld God, he said to his wife, "O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker."

Now Satan attempted to assign names to the animals. He failed with the first two that presented themselves, the ox and the cow. God led two others before him, the camel and the donkey, with the same result.

Then God turned to Adam, and questioned him regarding the names of the same animals, framing His questions in such a way that the first letter of the first word was the same as the first letter of the name of the animal standing before him. Thus Adam divined the proper name, and Satan was forced to acknowledge the superiority of the first man. Nevertheless he broke out in wild outcries that reached the heavens, and he refused to do homage unto Adam as he had been bidden.

The host of angels led by him did likewise, in spite of the urgent representations of Michael, who was the first to prostrate himself before Adam in order to show a good example to the other angels. Michael addressed Satan: "Give adoration to the image of God! But if you do it not, then the Lord God will break out in wrath against you."

Satan replied: "If He breaks out in wrath against me, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I will be like the Most High!" At once, God flung Satan and his host out of heaven, down to the earth, and from that moment dates the enmity between Satan and man....

Eve's version

After I was created, God divided Paradise and all the animals therein between Adam and me. The east and the north were assigned to Adam, together with the male animals. I was mistress of the west and the south and all the female animals.

Satan, smarting under the disgrace of having been dismissed from the heavenly host, resolved to bring about our ruin and avenge himself upon the cause of his discomfiture. He won the serpent over to his side, and pointed out to him that before the creation of Adam the animals could enjoy all that grew in Paradise, and now they were restricted to the weeds. To drive Adam from Paradise would therefore be for the good of all. The serpent demurred, for he stood in awe of the wrath of God. But Satan calmed his fears, and said, "Become my vessel, and I shall speak a word through your mouth by which you will succeed in seducing man."

The serpent thereupon suspended himself from the wall surrounding Paradise, to carry on his conversation with me from without. And this happened at the very moment when my two guardian angels had taken themselves to heaven to supplicate the Lord. I was quite alone, therefore, and when Satan assumed the appearance of an angel, bent over the wall of Paradise, and intoned seraphic songs of praise, I was deceived, and thought him an angel. A conversation was held between us, Satan speaking through the mouth of the serpent: "Are you Eve?"

"Yes, it is I."

"What are you doing in Paradise?"

"The Lord has put us here to cultivate it and eat of its fruits."

"That is good, yet you eat not of all the trees."

"That we do, except for a single one, the tree that stands in the midst of Paradise. Concerning it alone, God has forbidden us to eat of it, else, the Lord said, ye will die."

The serpent made every effort to persuade me that I had naught to fear—that God knew that in the day that Adam and I ate of the fruit of the tree, we should be as He Himself. It was jealousy that had made Him say, "You shall not eat of it."

In spite of all his urging, I remained steadfast and refused to touch the tree. Then the serpent engaged to pluck the fruit for me. Thereupon, I opened the gate of Paradise, and he slipped in. Scarcely was he within, when he said to me, "I repent of my words, I would rather not give you of the fruit of the forbidden tree."

It was but a cunning device to tempt me more. He consented to give me of the fruit only after I swore to make my husband eat of it, too. This is the oath he made me take: "By the throne of God, by the cherubim, and by the tree of life, I shall give my husband of this fruit, that he may eat, too." Thereupon the serpent ascended the tree and injected his poison, the poison of the evil inclination, into the fruit, and bent the branch on which it grew to the ground. I took hold of it, but I knew at once that I was stripped of the righteousness in which I had been clothed. I began to weep, because of it and because of the oath the serpent had forced from me.

The serpent disappeared from the tree, while I sought leaves with which to cover my nakedness, but all the trees within my reach had cast off their leaves at the moment when I ate of the forbidden fruit. There was only one that retained its leaves, the fig-tree, the very tree the fruit of which had been forbidden to me.

I summoned Adam, and by means of blasphemous words I prevailed upon him to eat of the fruit. As soon as it had passed his lips, he knew his true condition, and he exclaimed against me: "You wicked woman, what have you brought down upon me? You have removed me from the glory of God."

At the same time, Adam and I heard the archangel Michael blow his trumpet, and all the angels cried out: "Thus says the Lord, Come you with Me to Paradise and hearken unto the sentence which I will pronounce upon Adam."

We hid ourselves because we feared the judgment of God. Sitting in his chariot drawn by cherubim, the Lord, accompanied by angels uttering His praise, appeared in Paradise. At His coming the bare trees again put forth leaves. His throne was erected by the tree of life, and God addressed Adam: "Adam, where do you keep yourself in hiding? Do you think I cannot find you? Can a house conceal itself from its architect?"

Adam tried to put the blame on me, who had promised to hold him harmless before God. And I, in turn, accused the serpent. But God dealt out justice to all three of us. To Adam He said: "Because you did not obey My commands, but did hearken unto the voice of your wife, cursed is the ground in spite of your work. When you cultivate it, it will not yield you its strength. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, and in the sweat of your face shall you eat bread. You will suffer many a hardship, you will grow weary, and yet find no rest. Bitterly oppressed, you shall never taste of any sweetness. You shall be scourged by heat, and yet pinched by cold. You shall toil greatly, and yet not gain wealth. You shall grow fat, and yet cease to live. And the animals over which you are the master will rise up against you, because you did not keep my command."

Upon me God pronounced this sentence: "You shall suffer anguish in childbirth and grievous torture. In sorrow shall you bring forth children and, in the hour of travail, when you are near to lose your life, you will confess and cry, ' Lord, Lord, save me this time, and I will never again indulge in carnal pleasure,' and yet your desire shall ever and ever be unto your husband."

At the same time all sorts of diseases were decreed upon us. God said to Adam: "Because you did turn aside from My covenant, I will inflict 70 plagues upon your flesh. The pain of the first plague shall lay hold on your eyes; the pain of the second plague upon your hearing, and one after the other all the plagues shall come upon you."

God addressed the serpent thus: "Because you became the vessel of the Evil One, deceiving the innocent, cursed are you above all cattle and above every beast of the field. You shall be robbed of the food you were wont to eat, and dust shall you eat all the days of your life. Upon your breast and your belly shall you go, and shall be deprived of your hands and feet. You shall not remain in possession of your ears, nor of your wings, nor of any of your limbs wherewith you did seduce the woman and her husband, bringing them to such a pass that they must be driven forth from Paradise. And I will put enmity between you and the seed of man. It shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel until the day of judgment."

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 Akiba (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 Akiba, 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 that the sin of Adam and Eve was not sexual indulgence, then, but disobedience. Thus read, the temptation story communicates other values besides sexual ones—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. One rabbi suggests that it may be a necessary element of human character: "Without the evil impulse, who would marry or build a house?" Yet the temptation story warns us to check the evil impulse.

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 not the Lord who accurately foretells the consequences of sin, but the serpent? 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 temptation 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 forbears 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, with understanding, the visionary one, endowed with ambition and curiosity, whose abilities, ironically, have from the very 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 the result has, indeed, 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 has also 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 has also 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, have, alas, 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: THE STORY OF THE: GARDEN OF EDEN (II)

Anyone interested in the anthropology of the Bible starts by studying the story of the first human beings, living in the Garden of Eden. Here, in the form of a compelling tale of human beginnings, we encounter a revealing portrait of human nature, stripped of its cultural accretions and adornments. As we saw in the last chapter, the story’s presentation of the problem of human freedom proves also to be a profound meditation on human speech, reason, and self-consciousness and their role in human choice and action. But the Garden of Eden story sheds light not only on matters of mind and will, but also on matters of the heart: human sexual desire and erotic love, engines of human aspiration and association. As the narrative makes clear, human reason emerges only in conjunction with human sociality; and the natural seed of human sociality, the text makes plain, is sex. Gender-neutral humanity is an abstraction or, at most, a condition of childhood; real human beings come divided by sex, male and female. The primary story of our humanity is necessarily a story also about man and woman.

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. Every culture answers them, at least tacitly, and many do so explicitly, in ways ranging from founding tales and stories to specific rules of conduct. 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: the paradigmatic account of man and woman is the one conveyed through the Garden of Eden story. 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. All subsequent treatments of these matters will build upon this foundation; the Bible’s later prescriptions regarding sexuality will speak to the moral difficulties whose roots are here exposed. 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

As we saw in the last chapter, the basic level of human life is 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.

As we shall see, human 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.¹ Looking into the mirror provided by the story, we readers can verify the existence of the separable sexual elements and distinctive kinds of erotic desire, in part because we have experienced their independent powers in the emergence our own sexuality, beginning with puberty. Not surprisingly, the primary sexual element is not uniquely human. Accordingly, in the story it appears in the context of man among the animals.

To prepare him for his appropriate counterpart, man's desire for company is stimulated by encountering the animals. In the last chapter, we saw how this confrontation awakens his dormant powers of reason, now exercised in the activity of naming. But man's naming of the animals is not merely a disinterested scientific exercise in taxonomy; it is part of a quest to satisfy newly awakened desires. 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: why else did God start his effort to solve the problem of man's aloneness by creating the animals? But it is less clear what sort of partner, to satisfy which desire, the man is seeking. Innocent, high-minded, or puritanical readers will believe that the lonely man is looking for human company, for a rational soulmate, a fellow namer-and-speaker with whom he can share thoughts and speeches.² But as the sequel makes plain, the desire

¹ Although we meet these three elements of sex and aspects of love one at a time, and although they are distinguishable for purposes of analysis, they exist in human beings not as separated layers piled one atop the other, but concretely mixed and intertwined. It is partly for this reason that the meaning of human sexuality is so perplexing.

² For a long time, I confess, I was such a reader. I began to reconsider when I once asked in class, expecting a high-minded answer, "What is the man looking for?" A lusty young man blurted out, "Sex," and after the class's nervous laughter subsided, he then proceeded to support his position with evidence from the text, which, as we shall see, is very much about sex. It was about this time that I began to see the Garden of Eden story as conveying a descriptive and realistic picture of human nature, rather than a normative and idealistic one.

here aroused is almost certainly sexual.³ This should not surprise us: no worthy account of primordial human nature would fail to give sexual desire a central place; any true account of primordial human sociality would focus on the bonds rooted in erotic attraction.

In the immediate sequel, God creates the desired counterpart out of man himself; He makes or builds a woman ('ishah) out of the man's ('adam's) rib, and brings her unto the man.

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 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. (2:21-22)

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.⁴

Some critics see in this account of woman's origin evidence that the text is sexist: not only is man created first and woman second, but woman's being is derivative and dependent on man. But 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 as the image of a lost rib suggests, 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 made from the rib is presumably not in any way deformed or incomplete.⁵ 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, a matter to which we soon come.

The charge of sexism might receive an even more radical answer. 'Adam—the prototypical human being—prior to the creation of woman was, in fact, either sexless or androgynous: the female principle was within; only after the separation is there really male and female, only then does sexuality make a difference. Never mind anatomy: the original 'adam is functionally gender-indifferent—in keeping with the fact that the basic stratum of embodied life and its self-

³ If this is correct, the text's remark, "but for the human being there was not found a counterpart" (2:20) may be read, anthropologically, as asserting that animals are not fitting sexual partners for human beings (and perhaps also morally, as rejecting the practice of bestiality).

⁴ This account of human division and its psychic consequences is usefully compared with the famous story about the birth of erotic desire told by the comic poet Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*. In that account, Zeus tries to remedy a dangerous tendency of original human beings to storm heaven by halving their strength and giving them some other desire to occupy them. He has Apollo perform symmetrical hemisection on the original circle men (each of whom, to begin with, had four arms and four legs, and two faces on a single head and neck), thus producing upright, bipedal creatures of human shape and appearance. As a result of the cleavage, each human being erotically longs to find and unite sexually with its missing other half, to restore a mythical lost wholeness. (The resulting coupling offers a perfect caricature of sexual concourse.) The surgery in the Garden of Eden is less drastic than Apollo's, but its meaning and consequences may be more alike than different.

⁵ Indeed, as we shall see later, the woman is created not with a deficiency but with an excess, an overflowing capacity for generating new life.

preservation has nothing whatsoever to do with sex. (Conversely, sex has nothing to do with self-preservation.) The original human being—that is, the first or lowest element of human life—is, even today, sexless and nonerotic.

But one must not ignore the gender asymmetry in the presentation. Though in the absence of woman he may experience nothing of his maleness and know nothing of its meaning, the first human being seems to have been male. And be that as it may, it is certainly with a sense of his own masculine priority and prerogative that the man reacts to the woman's appearance, as have billions of men down to the present day:

And the man said,

"This one at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman [ishah] because from Man [ish] this one was taken." (2:23)

In our analysis, in the last chapter, of this first human sentence, we noted that it is a poetic speech of pent-up desire ("This one at last"). We also observed, from the names he here gives to the woman and to himself, that the appearance of woman makes man feel his masculinity, which is to say, his desire for her. And we saw, in his expostulation and in the explanation he gives for her name, how he is defining her in light of his possessive desire. Let us now look more closely at this speech, regarded as an expression of first sexual desire or, if you will, the germ of love.

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, as we noted in the last chapter, the man, his vision clouded by his desire, looks upon the woman as an extension of himself, indeed, as his possession: flesh of my flesh and bone of my bone, this one is mine; this one is me. 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.⁶ 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).⁷

⁶ The self-centered character of his love is also conveyed by the fact that he is speaking about her to himself.

⁷ This moving remark is widely taken to be the basis of the biblical teaching about monogamous marriage. The passage is regarded as the divine institution of marriage, and references to it abound in Christian marriage ceremonies. One hesitates to disagree with tradition, especially when one applauds the sentiment and likes the edifying teaching. But given the context of the remark, I doubt this interpretation. For one thing, God's commandments and institutions are always explicitly attributed to God as author, and are introduced by remarks such as "The Lord said"; this comment lacks any such mark of divine establishment. For another thing, we are in that part of the Bible that is given over to description, not to law, and the story we are reading is set, to speak anachronistically, in the state of nature rather than the state of civil society, outside of which there may be coupling off but there is no matrimony. Coming where it does, the remark about leaving your father and mother seems to me best understood as a moral gloss not on monogamy, but on the sexual love of your own flesh, which, strictly speaking, means (also and especially) incest, including parent-child incest. The text, intervening to prevent a possible improper inference from the man's expression of desire seeking fusion, makes clear

This primordial aspect of sexuality is ubiquitous and well known. In Western thought, it is most famously represented in the Aristophanic tale of love as the search for one's own missing half, as the desire to close and fuse in order to restore a missing wholeness—which, tragically, cannot be restored. This root of erotic desire stirs the soul to repair or furnish a purely bodily lack. Corporeal, possessive, yet indifferent to rank or rule, unabashed because innocent and ignorant of what it truly means or wants, elementary sexual desire drives upright human beings toward a not especially human conjunction, caricatured as "making the beast with two backs." Whatever else may supervene to moderate or transform or humanize our sexual desire, this ancestral, lustful, and possessive sexuality remains present and powerful. All sexuality includes such an element, one that can best be "explained" on the hypothesis that its goal (unbeknownst to the participants) is the restoration of some lost bodily wholeness: the seemingly other is beloved because he or she is really just a missing part of oneself.

Perhaps one should not say "he or she." The speech of desire was the speech of the man: indeed, in announcing the "She is mine, she is me" character of his desire, 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. Stepping now outside the text, but prompted by its hint of possible asymmetry, 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. These thoughts are based on matters having more to do with reproduction than with sexual desire per se, but the implications for desire follow necessarily. 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.⁸

As sex has biological meaning in relation to reproduction, sexual differences would be, to begin with, differentiated according to germinal differences regarding perpetuation. For the female, the reproductive future rests on very few eggs; in human beings, chance for reproductive success rides on one egg a month. For the female, success would be enhanced by anything that would, first, guarantee fertilization and, second, gain support of and protection for her necessarily few progeny. The male reproductive future, less concentrated, is carried by

that love of your own flesh does not—that is, should not—lead to incest, as it does among our primate relations.

⁸ After reading the first chapter of this book, my readers, I trust, will not be disturbed by my use of biological, even evolutionary, evidence in support of a biblical view of human nature. For we are the way we are, regardless of how we came to be this way. Today, because of the prominence of cultural opinion that denies the existence of human nature and that regards gender as solely a matter of cultural construction, it becomes necessary to appeal to biology to support what was until only yesterday widely understood to be true of human nature, including, especially, basic natural differences between men and women.

billions of sperm. Part of the most effective male strategy is multiple, frequent, and polygamous inseminations. Compared to the egg, which travels little and stays protected close to home, the sperm must travel far in hostile territory, competing with many rivals; speed, energy, and tenacity will be rewarded and perpetuated by natural selection, and not only in the sperm. The differences regarding the female and male gametes are, no doubt, correlated with differences in female and male body structure and function, and also, more to our point, with differences of psyche, including the character of sexual desire. Evolutionarily speaking, in successful mammalian species the desire for copulation must necessarily be very strong in males; it must be even stronger in any species—like the human—in which the females do not go into heat but are sexually receptive throughout the estrous cycle. Female desire need not be mutual or mutually strong or aggressive; at least as far as animals are concerned, female receptivity would be sufficient. And even if female desire were strong—indeed, voracious—the limiting factor in reproductive success would be male desire and the ability to perform.

The situation is, speaking even only biologically, much more complicated. Other sex-related psychic elements—say, those related to courtship or pregnancy or nursing—complicate the picture. The economy and balance of desire will differ among mammals, depending, for example, on whether the male and female bond monogamously for life or whether polygamy or "casual sex" are the species' natural way. Further, as we shall soon see, other aspects of specifically human sexuality can and do alter this animal foundation—even before cultural influences have their powerful say. Yet, once again, Genesis seems to speak truly, not only by presenting as a distinct aspect this basic level of sexuality—animal appetite for union with "one's own flesh"—but also in hinting that, at this level, sexual desire may be asymmetrically distributed, with perhaps differing focus, direction, and intensity among males and females. If this is true, the focus of woman's desire remains, for now, a mystery.

Whatever might be the case about sex differences in sexual desire, there is—to return to our story—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 previously considered how conversation between the serpent and the woman generated the requisite self-knowledge. But we then 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 has in fact 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—a judgment, it is true, not wholly unfounded given the overall context. 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. Unlike the man, with his desires sexually fixated upon the woman, the 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, however diffuse in direction and ambiguous in result, 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. Worse yet, fusion is impossible: copulation gets us only apposition, not the desired unification. 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, as we lie down with necessity. Our nascent pride, born of reflection, is embarrassed by the way we need and are needed by the sexual other. Later, on further reflection, we discover that the genitalia are a sign of our perishability and that their activity is, willy-nilly, a vote in favor of our own demise, providing as it does for those who will replace us.

Finally, all this noticing is itself problematic. For in turning our attention inward, we manifest a further difficulty, the difficulty of self-consciousness itself. For a peculiarly human doubleness is

present in the soul,⁹ 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. Because we are now beings with a nascent sense of pride (which can easily be wounded), we 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.

The deep connection between sexual self-consciousness and shame is universal. In its primordial form, it has nothing to do with puritan morality or with believing that sex is dirty or sinful; indeed, as the story clearly indicates, shame's relation to sexuality is not cultural but entirely natural.¹⁰ Man's and woman's eyes are opened together; neither speaks a word to the other. Yet as soon as they see themselves being seen by their counterpart, their minds immediately grasp the meaning of what is right before (and below) their eyes. Proud reason discovers the embarrassing truth of our abiding animality and all that that entails.

The emergence of shame and sexual self-consciousness—mutually and equally, it should be stressed—radically transforms relations between man and woman. Sexual attraction is now suffused with a concern for approbation and a fear of rejection. Each discovers that the other is genuinely and irreducibly other, not an alienated portion of oneself. Moreover, each discovers that his or her relation to the other is not only unfree and needy, but even demanding—all reasons why one might meet with both disapprobation and refusal.

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. Through courtship and flirtation, inspiration and seduction, a new dialectic is introduced into the dance: approval, admiration, and regard require keeping lovers apart at the beholding distance, yet the original sexual instinct drives toward fusion. A new and genuine intimacy is born out of the delicate need to preserve

⁹ This second "doubleness" is an addition to the more fundamental one, found in all animals that reproduce sexually, namely, the doubleness of self-love and sexual desire. In human beings as in animals, sexual desire, unlike hunger or thirst, serves an end that is partly hidden from, and is finally at odds with, the self-serving individual. The salmon swimming upstream to spawn and die tell the universal story: sex is bound up with death, to which it holds a partial answer in procreation. This bifurcation between the drive for self-preservation and the self-sacrificing drive for sexual reproduction, though present blindly in all higher animals, is known only to human beings. The Garden of Eden story shows how the peculiarly human mental doubleness that is self-consciousness begins by recognizing this silent, animal doubleness of sexual embodiment.

¹⁰ For a profound discussion of shame, including its natural involvement with sex and love, and its relation to awe and reverence, see Kurt Riezler, "Comment on the Social Psychology of Shame," *American Journal of Sociology*, 48 (January 1943), 457-65. Among Riezler's many sage observations are these: "Shame asks for the concealment of our sexual actions. It guards their privacy. All peoples exclude the observer. The observer or he who consents to being observed is shameless" (460). "Mutual love banishes shame. In a sexual intercourse that we imagine to be the mere satisfaction of a biological urge and without a tinge of love shame insists on being present; without love, the companion becomes the observer....Shame protects love in sex against sex without love" (461-62).

and negotiate this distance and its closure. 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. They too experience sexual and other necessity, but they neither know it nor know it as necessary. This knowledge, though humbling, is not disabling. On the contrary, it is the spur to rise. 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. Thanks to modesty and shame, embodied in clothing, love of the beautiful elevates human longings and declares itself triumphantly indifferent to our frailty and our finitude.¹¹

One can hardly exaggerate the importance of this moment. Kant has captured it, economically and profoundly, in his commentary on the fig leaf:

In the case of animals, sexual attraction is merely a matter of transient, mostly periodic, impulse. But man soon discovered that for him this attraction can be prolonged and even increased by means of the imagination—a power which carries on its business, to be sure, the more moderately, but at once also the more constantly and uniformly, the more its object is removed from the senses. By means of the imagination, he discovered, the surfeit was avoided which goes with the satisfaction of mere animal desire. The fig leaf (3:7), then, was a far greater manifestation of reason than that shown in the earlier stage of development. For the one [i.e., desiring the forbidden fruit] shows merely a power to choose the extent to which to serve impulse; but the other—rendering an inclination more inward and constant by removing its object from the senses—already reflects consciousness of a certain degree of mastery of reason over impulse. Refusal was the feat which brought about the passage from merely sensual to spiritual attractions, from mere animal desire gradually to love, and along with this from the feeling of the merely agreeable to a taste for beauty, at first only for beauty in man but at length for beauty in nature, as well. In addition, there came a first hint at the development of man as a moral creature. This came from the sense of decency, which is an inclination to inspire others to respect by proper manners, i.e., by concealing all that which might arouse low esteem. Here, incidentally, lies the real basis of all true sociability.

¹¹ It is worth noticing that, on this account, the primary truth about the human body sexually considered is not beauty but ugliness: beautification occurs and embellishes, but the underlying truth is not beautiful. It follows, therefore, that human eros, insofar as it is inspired by and seeks the beautiful, rests ultimately on an illusion: the beloved is, first and last, not a perfect, undivided, imperishable, and self-contained thing of beauty, meriting unqualified and wholehearted devotion. In this respect, the Bible seems to differ from classical Greek thought and sensibility, which appears to treat eros as a response solicited by the truly and genuinely beautiful, of which the beautiful unadorned naked body is the most obvious and immediate incarnation. Socrates' speech on eros in Plato's *Symposium* offers, at least at first glance, perhaps the starkest contrast with the Bible.

This may be a small beginning. But if it gives a wholly new direction to thought, such a beginning is epoch-making. It is then more important than the whole immeasurable series of expansions of culture which subsequently spring from it.

Though the seeds of sociability and civilization are, indeed, sown here, Kant's picture is too rosy. From the Bible's point of view, the human response to sexual awareness, while perfectly intelligible and humanizing, is at best partial, at worst distorting. The human couple now moves to heal the rift by looking mainly, not solely, to each other. They turn inward, "we two against a sea of troubles." Mutual self-help and self-reliance are the order of the day. But the love born of wounded pride still bears the marks and concerns of the proud. The concern with self-esteem becomes vanity; the desire to win approval produces servility; the possibility of rejection gives birth to jealousy and enmity. These manifestations of *amour propre* greatly complicate the story of man and woman, as Rousseau (more psychologically astute than his high-minded student Kant) would later observe, addressing precisely this same transformation of natural lust into human love:

[T]he passing intercourse demanded by nature soon leads to another kind no less sweet and more permanent through mutual frequentation. People grow accustomed to consider different objects and to make comparisons; imperceptibly they acquire ideas of merit and beauty which produce sentiments of preference. By dint of seeing one another, they can no longer do without seeing one another again. A tender and gentle sentiment is gradually introduced into the soul and at the least obstacle becomes an impetuous fury. Jealousy awakens with love, discord triumphs, and the gentlest of the passions receives sacrifices of human blood....Each one began to look at the others and to want to be looked at himself, and public esteem had a value. The one who sang or danced the best, the handsomest, the strongest, the most adroit, or the most eloquent became the most highly considered; and that was the first step toward inequality and, at the same time, toward vice. From these first preferences were born on the one hand vanity and contempt, on the other shame and envy; and the fermentations caused by these new leavens eventually produced compounds fatal to happiness and innocence.

The biblical story, at this stage, can hardly show all these difficulties, especially because it features only one man and one woman. But all these passions and their potentially violent effects are born with pride and shame, as we learn from the stories that follow in the sequel, beginning immediately with Cain and Abel. Welcome though it may be, the lovability of self-esteem is not necessarily good for love.

Yet, again returning 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.¹²

GENEROUS LOVE: PROCREATION

Love's connection to the divine is, according to our story, largely indirect. Shamefaced love may indeed enable human beings to hear the transcendent voice. But transcendence is more immediately accessible because of a newfound awareness of the meaning of our sexual being: sex means generativity. Beyond desire for bodily union and beyond erotic love and romance,

¹² This matter was briefly discussed in the last chapter. Here we consider how an opening to the divine enters and transforms the relationship between man and woman.

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.

Unto the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy pregnancy; in pain thou shalt bear children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee."

(3:16)

First, there is the burden of pregnancy and the pain of childbirth, a physiological consequence and sign of our peculiar and troublesome nature. 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 "Thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee"? Most readers agree that it signifies the institution of patriarchy, the rule of man over woman and her progeny. But everything else about the remark is disputed. For example, some 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, and see it as necessary protection against future womanly waywardness. 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, which shamelessly invokes God's will to support the male prerogative.

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.¹³ 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. (We recall the female reproductive strategy, operative throughout the mammalian world: enlist all the help you can in support of your very few eggs and their living outcomes.)

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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. Only the mother can name the father and establish the paternity of her children. Woman, therefore, controls legitimacy: 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

¹³ Is it only when the children arrive that the woman's attitude changes and her man really matters to her? Or is it once she becomes aware that children are naturally central to her sexual being that she develops a keen interest in the man who will father and (especially) provide for them? Readers familiar with *War and Peace* should consider, in this connection, Natasha's intense love for and jealousy of her husband, Pierre, once she becomes a mother (see the "First Epilogue"). Young romantic readers (especially males) who have fallen in love with the irrepressible and carefree young Natasha are often astonished and distressed to discover how her love of her children has reordered her entire soul and transformed all of her longings and desires.

¹⁴ People who are acculturated to accept as natural the two-parent family rarely consider the necessity of providing inducements for males to accept domestication and familial responsibility. What, before the emergence of strong cultural influences, would lead a man to slave away in order to put food into other people's mouths, especially when food is scarce or when danger is at hand?

¹⁵ Does nature arrange male rule in the human household by something like instinct? Or do human beings consciously arrange it, through awareness of their needs and interests? The text does not enable us to decide between the alternatives. The fact that this arrangement is announced by divine speech could support either alternative: it might indicate that the arrangement results from rational and deliberate decision (rather than from instinct), or it might indicate that the highest principle of Being attests to the unavoidable necessity of this arrangement.

require some form of male rule, especially over the exercise of female sexuality.¹⁶ 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. Division of labor between man and woman, implicit in generation and therefore in sexual difference as such, would, by itself, sow seeds of conflict. Especially if their separate work reflects, impresses, and also fosters differences of body and soul, different work means at least partly different outlooks and sensibilities, leading also to differences of opinion and interest. This possibility of conflict of interest all by itself points to the need for rule and authority, especially when the unruly children start to emerge. Yet the 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. True, a genuine ruler rules only in the interest of the ruled; the tyrant is not, strictly speaking, a ruler. True, rule imposes on the ruler heavy burdens, cares, and responsibilities, not borne by the ruled. And both the woman's desire for her husband and his need to prove himself worthy of her desire and of remaining her lover might protect—at least at first—burdened and weaker woman from simple tyranny and, even more, from abandonment. But rule and power very often corrupt; and in any case, distinction and inequality

¹⁶ I am aware that other arguments have been advanced—and attacked—regarding the control of female sexuality. Some thinkers—Rousseau, for example—see females as more lustful than males, and call attention to the voracity, indeterminacy, and wildness of female sexual appetite; they fear that unregulated female desire will exhaust and enervate men or will neutralize their manly strength and independence. (See, for instance, the classical story, told in Book VIII of Homer's *Odyssey*, of how the sex goddess, Aphrodite, tames Ares, the god of war; consider also the biblical story of Samson and Delilah.) But there is nothing in this text, and especially in the present biblical story, to suggest such a concern. Primordial man's manliness is not the focus, as it might be in founding tales of heroic cultures; indeed, his independent aloneness was divinely cured by the creation of a sexual partner. More important, the explicit local context is not female sexual passion but procreation.

There are, however, other arguments for controlling female sexuality that do worry about female fecundity: woman's life-giving power is celebrated in pagan fertility cults and goddess worship, in those cultures and religions that elevate blood ties above reason, order, and law. (See, for example, the contest between the Furies and Apollo and Athena—between the earthbound deities and the Olympians—in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*.) It is more than plausible to argue that the biblical author shares this concern. Fertility cults belong to nature worship, a cultural outlook opposed by the Bible from its very beginning, where it teaches that the world is created by a single God through speech, not generated by a god and goddess through giving birth. We will soon encounter, in the very next chapter, the boast of Eve regarding her childbearing powers; we will consider how female procreative pride constitutes an obstacle to establishing the biblical way, a problem subsequently addressed by the unnatural barrenness of three of the four matriarchs. Along these lines, Herman Jacobs, a student in the Committee on Social Thought, has argued (in an excellent paper, "From Eve to Joseph: Establishing the Rule of the Husband") that the entire book of Genesis is a story of men wresting control of generation away from women, eventually fulfilling what Jacobs takes to be God's clear preference announced in the passage (3:16) here under discussion. I grant that there may be some truth in this argument, but I am more impressed by the Bible's emphasis—which I will demonstrate in later chapters—on the natural wayward sexuality of males, their penchant for heroic deed and the taking of beautiful women as prizes, and their frequent indifference to progeny. Domesticating males and turning them into responsible fathers, into men who will (eventually) undertake the paternal work of cultural transmission, is a far bigger challenge, from the point of view of Genesis, than female fertility. The present passage shows how that process gets started, and what is psychologically and socially necessary to establish the human family.

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 encounter the rapacious conduct of the sons of God toward the daughters of man (6:2), which, like the rape of Helen, heralds the chaotic battles of the heroes, leading God to flood the earth and start again with Noah. We will note with disgust the predatory behavior of Pharaoh, who rounds up beautiful women for his harem (12:14-15). We will witness with revulsion Lot's 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 thee," leads God to turn next to 'adam, the being who just learned of his future position as ruler. The report is hardly cheering:

"Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, 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 sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles 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 [*ha'adamah*]; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return [*ki-'afar 'atah ve'el-'afar tashuv*]. (3:17-19)

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.¹⁷

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

¹⁷ This comment serves as an ironic gloss on man's earlier naming the woman [*ishah*] in terms of her origin from him (2:23): looking backward to the source only gets man back to his earthly and dusty beginnings. (I owe (I owe this observation to Father Paul Mankowski.) In the immediate sequel, the man will adopt a more forward-looking and more adequate view of woman.

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.¹⁸ 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.

Despite the hardships connected with their rearing, no one who understands would see children mainly as a burden. A child is good because being is good, because life is good, because the renewal of human possibility is good. One's child is a good that is one's own, though it is good not because it is one's own. Rather, one's own children become one's own share of that-good-which-is-children. Through children, male and female finally achieve some genuine unification (beyond the mere sexual "union," which fails to do so): the two become one through sharing generous, not needy, love for this third being as good. Flesh of their flesh, the child is the parents' own commingled being externalized, and given a separate and persisting existence; unification is enhanced also by their commingled work of rearing. Providing an opening to the future beyond the grave, carrying not only our seed but also our names, our ways, and our hope that they will surpass us in goodness and happiness, children are a testament to the possibility of transcendence. Sexual duality, which first draws man's love upward and outside himself (away from his preoccupation with self-preservation), finally provides for the partial overcoming of the confinement and limitation of perishable embodiment altogether.

Needless to say, man and woman in the garden, anticipating children, would not speak of them in this way. If the desire to bear children depended on such philosophizing, the race would have long since become extinct. Rather, nature has conspired to make children attractive, lively, responsive, and lovable—directly and immediately. Nature has conspired to make parents take joy in children and to love them from the start, and even when they don't deserve it. Yet these simple passions embody and do the heavy work that the being of man and woman itself intends.

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

¹⁸ The woman at this point keeps silence; thus, we do not know her reaction either to God's prophetic speech or to the man's effusive reaction and her renaming. Cynics will argue that it is just like a man to glory in his wife's fecundity, while she, again, must grin—or grit her teeth—and bear the children. But as we will see in the next chapter, the woman revels in her exalted status as creator: upon the birth of Cain, the firstborn, it is Eve who boasts of her creative power while Adam is speechless, and Cain hears the name of his mother's pride.

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....¹⁹

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.

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. Woman as life-giver has a direct route to a partial triumph over mortality; man does not. Her life-giving power gains her her proper name; in contrast, lacking such an answer to mortality, he still carries the general (species) name of "earthling," a reminder of his impending death. 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 circumscribed in the covenant, and his love for the long-awaited Isaac must be subordinated to his

¹⁹ Note that Rousseau describes the situation from the man's point of view: he refers to paternal 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 be cultivated.

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.

THE MEANINGS OF SEXUAL COMPLEMENTARITY

Before leaving this complicated story about man and woman, we should look back at what we have learned. Reading anthropologically and descriptively, in the way we have attempted, we see more sharply the various inherent elements—somatic, psychic, and social—of our own gendered and engendering existence; and we see how the tensions among them are almost guaranteed to cause trouble, both for thought and for action. There is our sexually neutral, needy, private, and self-loving interest in our own personal survival and well being. There is complementary sexual duality without, experienced as needy incompleteness within, issuing in animal-like lust for bodily union—perhaps more powerfully felt in the male. There is, as in all sexual beings, a built-in nonconscious bifurcation in our nature, in both males and females, because sexual impulses directed outwardly toward another are in principle in conflict with self-interested impulses directed toward self-preservation. There is the differentiation into two sexes, with nonidentical desires and interests, whose differences both incite union and also threaten divorce. There is human sexual self-consciousness, and rational consciousness more generally, that add yet an additional, reflective kind of bifurcation to the human soul, part of whose meaning is expressed imaginatively in shame, modesty, refusal, adornment, flirtation, courtship, display, approbation, acceptance, rejection, beautification, illusion, vanity, coquetry, aspiration, flattery, wiliness, seduction, jealousy, the desire to please, and the search for self-esteem—all intrinsic aspects of the humanization of sex, the sublimation of lust, and the possibility of love and sociability. There is the strange problem of distance and desire that results from the inexplicable connection between sexuality and the love of the beautiful, as beauty beheld at the viewing distance drives us toward merging, unbeautifully and sightlessly, at no distance whatsoever. There is generativity and childbirth, followed by domestication and rearing, and all that that implies, including, on the one hand, rivalry and risk of inequality, on the other hand, concern for lineage and hope for transcendence—the overcoming of privacy, duality, and perishability. Finally there is, through sexual self-consciousness, an opening to the truly transcendent and eternal, whatever it may be, best evidenced in the experience of (a) wonder at the beautiful beloved, (b) respect before the mystery of sexual complementarity and its peculiarly human self-conscious and imaginative embodiment, (c) awe in the face of life and sex and love and other great powers not of our making and not under our command, and (d) gratitude for the unmerited gift of creative powers exercisable through procreative handing down of our living humanity to the next generation.

All these elements can, of course, be clothed by culture, and altered by customs, rituals, beliefs, and diverse institutional arrangements. But the elements themselves are none of them cultural constructions, nor is there likely to be any conceivable cultural arrangement that can harmonize to anyone's satisfaction all their discordant tendencies. On the contrary, political and cultural efforts to rationally solve the problem of man and woman—and we are, to be frank, in the midst of such utopian spasms—will almost certainly be harmful, even dehumanizing, to man, to woman, and especially to children, not least because the matters are so delicate and private, and their deeper meanings inexpressible.

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).