



TIKVAH
ONLINE
ACADEMY

Jewish and Greek Views on the Human Condition

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Course Description:

The attempt to account for an essential feature of the human condition through the story of a “fall from our ancient nature” shows up in two texts, one from the Bible, one from Greek philosophy. In the *Symposium*, Plato puts into the mouth of the comic poet Aristophanes a speech on eros that describes every human being as a fragmented half, longing for reunification with the other who could restore it to the whole it once was, before being subjected to divine punishment for its original ambition. That speech bears a striking resemblance to the account in Genesis of the primordial Adam created in the image of God, male and female at once, followed by the division of one being into man and woman, who go on to violate God’s most fundamental prohibition. In this seminar, we will explore what a comparison of the two texts can tell us about Athens and Jerusalem, the two roots of the Western tradition.

Guiding Questions:

1. In the fanciful speech Plato puts into the voice of the comic poet Aristophanes, human beings as we know them are the result of a fall from our “ancient nature”: what is the nature of the original human beings Aristophanes imagines and what is the basis for distinguishing three types? In the biblical account of Genesis 1, what does it mean for the primordial Adam, the human being created in the image of God, to be both male and female? In the new account in Genesis 2, where man and woman are produced out of an original Adam, what are the implications of the idea that the “rib” used for the creation of woman means “one side” of the original whole?
2. How does Aristophanes explain our experience of love as a response to our present condition, resulting from divine punishment of the original human beings? What was the essential impulse of those original humans and the motive of the god Zeus to punish them by dividing each one in half? If the union of man and woman in Genesis 2 can be seen as a response to our condition as partial beings, what is the motive of the biblical God for creating those beings out of the original Adam?
3. Aristophanes portrays the rebellion against authority of the gods undertaken by the original human beings out of a sense of their own completeness, while in Genesis 3, the violation of God’s primary prohibition is initiated by a partial being, the first woman: what is the

significance of that difference? How exactly should we understand the biblical God's prohibition and the motive of the woman (the woman inspired by the serpent?) to violate it?

4. Adam calls himself "man" (*esh*) for the first time at the same moment he calls "woman" (*esha*), recognizing her as "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." If the two can be understood as equal partners at the start, what is the cause of the transformation of their relationship in Genesis 3, so that man and woman become the first case of ruler and ruled? Does the biblical narrative suggest something about the nature of woman as initially depicted that leads to the need for this subsequent relationship of subordination?

Introduction:

The attempt to account for an essential feature of the human condition through the story of a “fall from our ancient nature” shows up in two texts, one from the Bible, one from Greek philosophy. The speech on eros in Plato’s Symposium, ascribed to the comic poet Aristophanes, describes every human being as a fragmented half, longing for reunification with the other who could restore it to the whole it once was, before being subjected to divine punishment for its original ambition. That speech bears a remarkable resemblance, although with striking differences, to the account in Genesis of the primordial Adam created in the image of God, at once male and female, followed by the division of a single Adam into man and woman, who go on to violate God’s most fundamental prohibition. We will explore what a comparison of the two texts can tell us about the relation between Athens and Jerusalem, the two roots of the Western tradition.

Background Material to the Some of the Sources and Figures

Aristophanes: Father of Comedy (c. 446-386 BCE)

Aristophanes was a comic playwright of ancient Greece. He is one of only three authors (along with Plato and Xenophon) who through their writings passed on the representation of Socrates. His most famous play, the *Clouds*, opens with Socrates in his “think tank,” where he teaches natural science and the art of rhetoric. Through the lens of ridicule it shows the potential dangers of Socratic philosophy in the political community, and it ends with the father of a student setting fire to the think tank.

Plato (424/423 – 348/347 BC)

The *Apology of Socrates* is Plato’s representation of the trial that resulted in Socrates’ condemnation and death. Socrates on that occasion refers to Aristophanes’ *Clouds* as the old source of a prejudice against him, which it would be impossible to overcome in the single day he has to defend himself. In that dialogue, among others, Plato is clearly responding to Aristophanes with his own defense of Socrates and Socratic philosophy against the comic poet’s critique. In the *Symposium*, Plato gives a voice to Aristophanes himself, offering a speech on eros that will be followed by Socrates’ account of love, each meant to reveal their understanding of human nature.

Philo (c. 20 BCE- 50 CE)

But when woman also was created, man perceiving a ... kindred formation, rejoiced at the sight... And she, in like manner... rejoiced also... And love being engendered, and, as it were, uniting two separate portions of one animal into one body, adapted them to each other, implanting in each of them a desire of connection with the other with a view to the generation of a being similar to themselves. (*On the Creation of the World* 53)

Midrash Rabbah: Genesis.

Rabbi Jeremiah ben Eleazar said: When the Holy One created Adam, He created him hermaphrodite, as is said, “male and female He created them . . . and called them Adam” (Gen. 5:2). Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman said: When the Holy One created Adam, He made him with two fronts; then He sawed him in half and then gave him two backs, a back for one part and a back for the other part. Someone objected: But does not Scripture say, He took one of his ribs (*mi-tzalotav*)? Rabbi Samuel replied: *Mi-tzalotav* may also mean “one of his sides” as in the verse “and for the other side (*tzela*) of the Tabernacle.” (Ex. 26:20) (trans. by H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, Vols. 1–2, Soncino Press, 1939.)

Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*

The intellect that God made overflow unto man and that is the latter’s ultimate perfection, was that which *Adam* had been provided with before he disobeyed. It was because of this that it was said of him that he was created *in the image of God and in His likeness*... However, when he disobeyed and inclined toward his desires of the imagination and the pleasures of his corporeal senses—inasmuch as it is said: *that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes*—he was punished by being deprived of that intellectual apprehension” (I.2).

The expression, one of his ribs, means according to them one of his sides. They quote as proof the expression, a rib of the tabernacle, which [the Aramaic translation] translates: a side of the tabernacle. In accordance with this, they say that [“one of his ribs”] means: of his sides. Understand in what way it has been explained that they were two in a certain respect and that they were also one; as it says: bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh (II.30).

Guiding Questions:

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- 2) How does Aristophanes explain our experience of love as a response to our present condition, resulting from divine punishment of the original human beings? What was the essential impulse of those original humans and the motive of the god Zeus to punish them by dividing each one in half? If the union of man and woman in Genesis 2 can be seen as a response to our condition as partial beings, what is the motive of the biblical God for creating those beings out of the original Adam?
- 3) Aristophanes portrays the rebellion against the authority of the gods undertaken by the original human beings out of a sense of their own completeness, while in Genesis 3, the violation of God’s primary prohibition is initiated by a partial being, the first woman: what is the significance of that difference? How exactly should we understand the biblical God’s prohibition and the motive of the woman (the woman inspired by the serpent?) to violate it?
- 4) Adam calls himself “man” (*esh*) for the first time at the same moment he calls “woman” (*esha*), recognizing her as “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” If the two can be understood as equal partners at the start, what is the cause of the transformation of their relationship in Genesis 3, so that man and woman become the first case of ruler and ruled? Does the biblical narrative suggest something about the nature of woman as initially depicted that leads to the need for this subsequent relationship of subordination?

“This is the great and overwhelming power that Eros as a whole has (and indeed it is rather close to total power); but the Eros concerned with good things, consummately perfected with moderation and justice, among us and among gods, this has the greatest power and provides us with every kind of happiness, making us able to associate with one another and to be friends even with the gods who are stronger than we are. Now, perhaps in praising Eros I too am omitting many things; but I have done that unwillingly. For if I did omit anything, it is your job, Aristophanes, to fill it in; or if you intend to make a different eulogy of the god, proceed to do so, since you have stopped hiccuping.”

He then said that Aristophanes accepted and said, “It has stopped, to be sure; not, however, before sneezing had been applied to it. So I wonder at the orderly decency of the body desiring such noises and garglings as a sneeze is; for my hiccuping stopped right away as soon as I applied the sneeze to it.”

And Eryximachus said, “My good Aristophanes, look at what you are doing. You have made [us] laugh just as you were about to speak; and you compel me to be a guardian of your own speech, lest you ever say anything laughable—though you did have the chance to speak in peace.”

And Aristophanes laughed and said, “You have made a good point, Eryximachus, and please let what has been said be as if it were never spoken. But do not be my guardian, for in what is about to be said I am not afraid to say laughable things—for that would be a gain and native to our Muse—but only things that are laughed at.”

“You believe you can hit and run, Aristophanes,” he said, “but pay attention and speak as though you are to render an account; perhaps, however, if I so resolve, I shall let you go.”

“Well, Eryximachus,” Aristophanes said, “I do intend to speak in a somewhat different vein from that in which you and Pausanias spoke. Human beings, in my opinion, have been entirely unaware of the power of Eros, since if they were aware of it, they would have provided the greatest sanctuaries and altars for him, and would be making him the greatest sacrifices, and not act as they do now when none of this happens to him, though it most certainly should. For Eros is the most philanthropic of gods, a helper of human beings as well as a physician dealing with an illness the healing of which would result in the greatest happiness for the human race. So I shall try to initiate you into his power; and you will be the teachers of everyone else. But you must first understand hu-

man nature and its afflictions. Our nature in the past was not the same as now but of a different sort. First of all, the races of human beings were three, not two as now, male and female; for there was also a third race that shared in both, a race whose name still remains, though it itself has vanished. For at that time one race was androgynous, and in looks and name it combined both, the male as well as the female; but now it does not exist except for the name that is reserved for reproach. Secondly, the looks of each human being were as a whole round, with back and sides in a circle. And each had four arms, and legs equal in number to his arms, and two faces alike in all respects on a cylindrical neck, but there was one head for both faces—they were set in opposite directions—and four ears, and two sets of genitals, and all the rest that one might conjecture from this. Each used to walk upright too, just as one does now, in whatever direction he wanted; and whenever he had the impulse to run fast, then just as tumblers with their legs straight out actually move around as they tumble in a circle, so did they, with their eight limbs as supports, quickly move in a circle. It is for this reason that the races were three and of this sort: because the male was in origin the offspring of the sun; the female, of the earth; and the race that shared in both, of the moon—since the moon also shares in both. And they themselves were globular, as was their manner of walking, because they were like their parents. Now, they were awesome in their strength and robustness, and they had great and proud thoughts, so they made an attempt on the gods. And what Homer says about Ephialtes and Otus,¹¹ is said about them—that they attempted to make an ascent into the sky with a view to assaulting the gods. Then Zeus and the other gods deliberated as to what they should do with them. And they were long perplexed, for the gods knew neither how they could kill them and (just as they had struck the giants with lightning) obliterate the race—for, in that case, their own honors and sacrifices from human beings would vanish—nor how they could allow them to continue to behave licentiously. Then Zeus thought hard and says, ‘In my own opinion,’ he said, ‘I have a device whereby human beings would continue to exist and at the same time, having become weaker, would stop their licentiousness. I shall now cut each of them in two,’ he said; ‘and they will be both weaker and more useful to us through the increase in their numbers. And they will walk upright on two legs. But if they are thought

11. Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.305–20; *Iliad*, 5.385–91.

to behave licentiously still, and are unwilling to keep quiet, then I shall cut them again in two,' he said, 'so that they will go hopping on one leg.' As soon as he said this he began to cut human beings in two, just like those who cut sorb-apples in preparation for pickling, or those who cut eggs with hairs. And whenever he cut someone, he had Apollo turn the face and half the neck around to face the cut, so that in beholding his own cutting the human being might be more orderly; and he had him heal all the rest. Apollo turned the face around; and by drawing together the skin from everywhere toward what is now called the belly (just like drawstring bags) he made one opening, which he tied off in the middle of the belly, and that is what they call the navel. He shaped up the chest and smoothed out many of the other wrinkles, with somewhat the same kind of tool as shoemakers use in smoothing the wrinkles in leather on the last; but he left a few wrinkles, those on the belly itself and the navel, to be a reminder of our ancient affliction. When its nature was cut in two, each—desiring its own half—came together; and throwing their arms around one another and entangling themselves with one another in their desire to grow together, they began to die off due to hunger and the rest of their inactivity, because they were unwilling to do anything apart from one another; and whenever one of the halves did die and the other was left, the one that was left tried to seek out another and entangle itself with that, whether it met the half of the whole woman—and that is what we now call a woman—or of a man; and so they continued to perish. But Zeus took pity on them and supplies another device: He rearranges their genitals toward the front—for up till then they had them on the outside, and they generated and gave birth not in one another but in the earth, like cicadas—and for this purpose, he changed this part of them toward the front, and by this means made generation possible in one another, by means of the male in the female; so that in embracing, if a man meets with a woman, they might generate and the race continue; and if male meets with male, there might at least be satiety in their being together; and they might pause and turn to work and attend to the rest of their livelihood. So it is really from such early times that human beings have had, inborn in themselves, Eros for one another—Eros, the bringer-together of their ancient nature, who tries to make one out of two and to heal their human nature. Each of us, then, is a token of a human being, because we are sliced like fillets of sole, two out of one; and so each is always in search of his own token. Now all who are the men's slice from the common genus, which was then called androgynous, are lovers of

women; and many adulterers have been of this genus; and, in turn, all who are women of this genus prove to be lovers of men and adulteresses. And all women who are sliced off from woman hardly pay attention to men but are rather turned toward women, and lesbians arise from this genus. But all who are male slices pursue the males; and while they are boys—because they are cutlets of the male—they are friendly to men and enjoy lying down together with and embracing men; and these are the best of boys and lads, because they are naturally the manliest. Some, to be sure, assert that such boys are shameless, but they lie. For it is not out of shamelessness that they do this but out of boldness, manliness, and masculinity, feeling affection for what is like to themselves. And there is a great proof of this, for once they have reached maturity, only men of this kind go off to political affairs. When they are fully grown men, they are pederasts and naturally pay no attention to marriage and procreation, but are compelled to do so by the law; whereas they would be content to live unmarried with one another. Now it is one of this sort who wholly becomes a pederast and passionate lover, always feeling affection for what is akin to himself. And when the pederast or anyone else meets with that very one who is his own half, then they are wondrously struck with friendship, attachment, and love, and are just about unwilling to be apart from one another even for a short time. And here you have those who continue through life with one another, though they could not even say what they want to get for themselves from one another. For no one would be of the opinion that it was sexual intercourse that was wanted, as though it were for this reason—of all things—that each so enjoys being with the other in great earnestness; but the soul of each plainly wants something else. What it is, it is incapable of saying, but it divines what it wants and speaks in riddles. If Hephaestus with his tools were to stand over them as they lay in the same place and were to ask, 'What is it that you want, human beings, to get for yourselves from one another?'—and if in their perplexity he were to ask them again, 'Is it this you desire, to be with one another in the very same place, as much as is possible, and not to leave one another night and day? For if you desire that, I am willing to fuse you and make you grow together into the same thing, so that—though two—you would be one; and as long as you lived, you would both live together just as though you were one; and when you died, there again in Hades you would be dead together as one instead of as two. So see if you love this and would be content if you got it.' We know that there would not be even one who, if he heard this, would

193A refuse, and it would be self-evident that he wants nothing else than this; and he would quite simply believe he had heard what he had been desiring all along: in conjunction and fusion with the beloved, to become one from two. The cause of this is that this was our ancient nature and we were wholes. So love is the name for the desire and pursuit of the whole. And previously, as I say, we were one; but now through our injustice we have been dispersed by the god, just as the Arcadians were dispersed by the Spartans. There is the fear, then, that if we are not orderly in our behavior to the gods, we shall be split again and go around like those who are modeled in relief on stelae, sawed through our nostrils, like dice. For this reason every real man must be exhorted to be pious toward the gods in all his acts, so that we may avoid the one result and get the other, as B Eros is our guide and general. Let no one act contrary to Eros—and he acts contrary whoever incurs the enmity of the gods—for if we become friends and reconciled to the gods, we shall find out and meet with our own favorites, which few at the moment do. And please don't let Eryximachus suppose, in making a comedy of my speech, that I mean Pausanias and Agathon—perhaps they have found their own and are both naturally born males. For whatever the case may be with them, I am referring to all men and women: our race would be happy if we were to bring our love to a consummate end, and each of us were to get his own favorite on his return to his ancient nature. And if this is the best, it must necessarily be the case that, in present circumstances, that which is closest to it is the best; and that is to get a favorite whose nature is to one's taste. C D And were we to hymn the god who is the cause of this we should justly hymn Eros, who at the present time benefits us the most by leading us to what is our own; and in the future he offers the greatest hopes, while we offer piety to the gods, to restore us to our ancient nature and by his healing make us blessed and happy. 193d

E “Here, Eryximachus,” he said, “is my speech about Eros, different from yours. So, just as I begged you, don't make a comedy of it, in order that we may listen to what each of the others—or rather, what each of the two—will say; for Agathon and Socrates are left.”

“Well, I shall obey you,” he said Eryximachus said. “Your speech was indeed a pleasure for me. And if I did not know that both Socrates and Agathon were skilled in erotics, I should be very much afraid of their being at a loss for words on account of the fullness and variety of what has been said; but as it is, I am confident.”

Socrates then said, “That is because you yourself put up a fine show in the contest, Eryximachus; but if you were where I am now, or rather where I shall be when Agathon has spoken well, then you would really be afraid and as wholly baffled as I am now.” 194A

“You want to bewitch me, Socrates,” Agathon said. “You would have me believe that the audience is full of expectation that I shall speak well, and in that way, I shall be in turmoil.”

“I should surely be forgetful, Agathon,” Socrates said, “if I did that. I saw your courage and greatness of mind in mounting the platform with the actors and in facing so large an audience when you were about to display your own speeches, and I saw that you were in no way disturbed—should I now believe that you will be in a turmoil on account of us few human beings?” B

“What's this, Socrates?” Agathon said. “You really do not believe that I am so wrapped up in the theater as not to know that to a man of sense a few who are sensible are more terrifying than many fools?”

“Well, I should surely be in disgrace, Agathon,” he said, “were I to presume any lack of urbanity in you; for I know very well that were you to meet any you believed wise, you would think more of them than of the many. But I suspect that we shall not prove to be of the wise, for we too were present there and were part of the many; but if you were to meet others who were indeed wise, then you might be ashamed before them—if you were perhaps to believe that you were doing something that is disgraceful. Is this what you mean?” C

“What you say is true.”

“But you would not be ashamed before the many if you believed you were doing something disgraceful?” D

Phaedrus then interrupted and said, “Dear Agathon, if you answer Socrates, it will not make any difference to him what effect this might have on our present arrangements, provided only that he has someone to converse with, especially if he is beautiful. And I myself listen to Socrates' conversation with pleasure; but I am compelled to attend to the eulogy to Eros and to receive from each one of you your speech; so let each of you repay the god and then go on conversing as you were.” E

“Well, what you say is fine, Phaedrus,” Agathon said, “and nothing keeps me from speaking; for it will be possible for me to converse with Socrates on many other occasions.”

“I want first to say how I must speak, and then to speak. For in my

CHAPTER 1

When God began to create heaven and earth, and the earth then was
welter and waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering
over the waters, God said, "Let there be light." And there was
light. And God saw the light, that it was good, and God divided the
light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness
He called Night. And it was evening and it was morning, first
day. And God said, "Let there be a vault in the midst of the waters,
and let it divide water from water." And God made the vault and it
divided the water beneath the vault from the water above the vault,
and so it was. And God called the vault Heavens, and it was evening
and it was morning, second day. And God said, "Let the waters under
the heavens be gathered in one place so that the dry land will appear,"

2. *welter and waste*. The Hebrew *tohu wabohu* occurs only here and in two later biblical texts that are clearly alluding to this one. The second word of the pair looks like a nonce term coined to rhyme with the first and to reinforce it, an effect I have tried to approximate in English by alliteration. *Tohu* by itself means emptiness or futility, and in some contexts is associated with the trackless vacancy of the desert.

hovering. The verb attached to God's breath-wind-spirit (*ruah*) elsewhere describes an eagle fluttering over its young and so might have a connotation of parturition or nurture as well as rapid back-and-forth movement.

5. *first day*. Unusually, the Hebrew uses a cardinal, not ordinal, number. As with all the six days except the sixth, the expected definite article is omitted.

6. *vault*. The Hebrew *raki'a* suggests a hammered-out slab, not necessarily arched, but the English architectural term with its celestial associations created by poetic tradition is otherwise appropriate.

10 and so it was. And God called the dry land Earth and the gathering of
 11 waters He called Seas, and God saw that it was good. And God said,
 "Let the earth grow grass, plants yielding seed of each kind and trees
 bearing fruit of each kind, that has its seed within it." And so it was.
 12 And the earth put forth grass, plants yielding seed of each kind, and
 trees bearing fruit that has its seed within it of each kind, and God
 13 saw that it was good. And it was evening and it was morning, third
 14 day. And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the heavens to
 divide the day from the night, and they shall be signs for the fixed
 15 times and for days and years, and they shall be lights in the vault of
 16 the heavens to light up the earth." And so it was. And God made the
 two great lights, the great light for dominion of day and the small light
 17 for dominion of night, and the stars. And God placed them in the
 18 vault of the heavens to light up the earth and to have dominion over
 day and night and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw
 19 that it was good. And it was evening and it was morning, fourth day.
 20 And God said, "Let the waters swarm with the swarm of living crea-
 tures and let fowl fly over the earth across the vault of the heavens."
 21 And God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that
 crawls, which the water had swarmed forth of each kind, and the
 22 winged fowl of each kind, and God saw that it was good. And God
 blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the water in
 23 the seas and let the fowl multiply in the earth." And it was evening
 24 and it was morning, fifth day. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth
 living creatures of each kind, cattle and crawling things and wild
 25 beasts of each kind. And so it was. And God made wild beasts of each
 kind and cattle of every kind and crawling things on the ground of
 each kind, and God saw that it was good.

24. *wild beasts*. Literally, the phrase would mean "beast of the earth," but the archaic construct form for "beasts of," *hayto*, elsewhere regularly occurs in collocations that denote wild beasts. In verse 25, the archaic form is not used, but given the close proximity of *hayat ha'arets* there to *hayto 'erets* here, it seems likely that the meaning is the same.

And God said, "Let us make a human in our image, by our likeness, 26
 to hold sway over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the heavens and
 the cattle and the wild beasts and all the crawling things that crawl
 upon the earth.

And God created the human in his image, 27
 in the image of God He created him,
 male and female He created them.

And God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multi- 28
 ply and fill the earth and conquer it, and hold sway over the fish of
 the sea and the fowl of the heavens and every beast that crawls upon
 the earth." And God said, "Look, I have given you every seed-bearing 29
 plant on the face of all the earth and every tree that has fruit bearing
 seed, yours they will be for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and 30

26. *a human*. The term *'adam*, afterward consistently with a definite article, which is used both here and in the second account of the origins of humankind, is a generic term for human beings, not a proper noun. It also does not automatically suggest maleness, especially not without the prefix *ben*, "son of," and so the traditional rendering "man" is misleading, and an exclusively male *'adam* would make nonsense of the last clause of verse 27.

hold sway. The verb *radah* is not the normal Hebrew verb for "rule" (the latter is reflected in "dominion" of verse 16), and in most of the contexts in which it occurs it seems to suggest an absolute or even fierce exercise of mastery.

the wild beasts. The Masoretic Text reads "all the earth," *bekhol ha'arets*, but since the term occurs in the middle of a catalog of living creatures over which humanity will hold sway, the reading of the Syriac Version, *hayat ha'arets*, "wild beasts," seems preferable.

27. In the middle clause of this verse, "him," as in the Hebrew, is grammatically but not anatomically masculine. Feminist critics have raised the question as to whether here and in the second account of human origins, in chapter 2, *'adam* is to be imagined as sexually undifferentiated until the fashioning of woman, though that proposal leads to certain dizzying paradoxes in following the story.

31 to all the fowl of the heavens and to all that crawls on the earth, which has the breath of life within it, the green plants for food." And so it was. And God saw all that He had done, and, look, it was very good. And it was evening and it was morning, the sixth day.

CHAPTER 2

1 Then the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their array.
2 And God completed on the seventh day the work He had done, and
3 He ceased on the seventh day from all the work He had done. And
4 God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, for on it He had ceased
5 from all His work that He had done. This is the tale of the heavens
6 and the earth when they were created.

5 On the day the LORD God made earth and heavens, no shrub of the
6 field being yet on the earth and no plant of the field yet sprouted, for
the LORD God had not caused rain to fall on the earth and there was
no human to till the soil, and wetness would well from the earth to

4. As many modern commentators have noted, the first Creation account concludes with the summarizing phrase in the first half of this verse: "This is the tale [literally, these are the begettings] of the heavens and the earth when they were created," these two paired terms, heavens and earth, taking us back in an envelope structure to the paired terms of the very first verse of the Creation story. Now, after the grand choreography of resonant parallel utterances of the cosmogony, the style changes sharply. Instead of the symmetry of parataxis, hypotaxis is initially prominent: the second account begins with elaborate syntactical subordination in a long complex sentence that uncoils all the way from the second part of verse 4 to the end of verse 7. In this more vividly anthropomorphic account, God, now called YHWH 'Elohim instead of 'Elohim as in the first version, does not summon things into being from a lofty distance through the mere agency of divine speech, but works as a craftsman, fashioning (*yatsar* instead of *bar'a*, "create"), blowing life breath into nostrils, building a woman from a rib. Whatever the disparate historical origins of the two accounts, the redaction gives us first a harmonious cosmic overview of creation and then a plunge into the technological nitty-gritty and moral ambiguities of human origins.

7 water all the surface of the soil, then the LORD God fashioned the
8 human, humus from the soil, and blew into his nostrils the breath of
9 life, and the human became a living creature. And the LORD God
10 planted a garden in Eden, to the east, and He placed there the human
11 He had fashioned. And the LORD God caused to sprout from the soil
12 every tree lovely to look at and good for food, and the tree of life was
13 in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge, good and evil.
14 Now a river runs out of Eden to water the garden and from there splits
15 off into four streams. The name of the first is Pishon, the one that
16 winds through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And
17 the gold of that land is goodly, bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli. And
the name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through all
the land of Cush. And the name of the third river is Tigris, the one
that goes to the east of Ashur. And the fourth river is Euphrates. And
the LORD God took the human and set him down in the garden of
Eden to till it and watch it. And the LORD God commanded the
human, saying, "From every fruit of the garden you may surely eat.
But from the tree of knowledge, good and evil, you shall not eat, for
on the day you eat from it, you are doomed to die."

7. *the human, humus.* The Hebrew etymological pun is 'adam, "human," from the soil, 'adamah.

16.-17. *surely eat . . . doomed to die.* The form of the Hebrew in both instances is what grammarians call the infinitive absolute: the infinitive immediately followed by a conjugated form of the same verb. The general effect of this repetition is to add emphasis to the verb, but because in the case of the verb "to die" it is the pattern regularly used in the Bible for the issuing of death sentences, "doomed to die" is an appropriate equivalent.

And the LORD God said, "It is not good for the human to be alone, I shall make him a sustainer beside him." And the LORD God fashioned from the soil each beast of the field and each fowl of the heavens and brought each to the human to see what he would call it, and whatever the human called a living creature, that was its name. And the human called names to all the cattle and to the fowl of the heavens and to all the beasts of the field, but for the human no sustainer beside him was found. And the LORD God cast a deep slumber on the human, and he slept, and He took one of his ribs and closed over the flesh where it had been, and the LORD God built the rib He had taken from the human into a woman and He brought her to the human. And the human said:

18. *sustainer beside him.* The Hebrew 'ezer kenegdo (King James Version "help meet") is notoriously difficult to translate. The second term means alongside him, opposite him, a counterpart to him. "Help" is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas 'ezer elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms.

22. *built.* Though this may seem an odd term for the creation of woman, it complements the potter's term, *fashion*, used for the creation of first human, and is more appropriate because the LORD is now working with hard material, not soft clay. As Nahum Sarna has observed, the Hebrew for "rib," *tse'la*, is also used elsewhere to designate an architectural element.

23. The first human is given reported speech for the first time only when there is another human to whom to respond. The speech takes the form of verse, a naming-poem, in which each of the two lines begins with the feminine indicative pronoun, *z'ot*, "this one," which is also the last Hebrew word of the poem, cinching it in a tight envelope structure.

This one at last, bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman,
for from man was this one taken.

24 Therefore does a man leave his father and his mother and cling to his
25 wife and they become one flesh. And the two of them were naked,
the human and his woman, and they were not ashamed.

24. *Therefore.* This term, 'al-ken, is the formula for introducing an etiological explanation: here, why it is that man separates from his parents and is drawn to join bodily, and otherwise, to a woman.

25. *And the two of them.* But characteristically, the narrative immediately unsettles the neatness of the etiological certainty, for the first couple are two, not one flesh, and their obliviousness to their nakedness is darkened by the foreshadow of the moment about to be narrated in which their innocence will be lost.

CHAPTER 3

Now the serpent was most cunning of all the beasts of the field that the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Though God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden—" And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the garden's trees we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said, 'You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'" And the serpent said to the woman, "You shall not be doomed to die. For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you

1. *cunning.* In the kind of pun in which the ancient Hebrew writers delighted, 'arum, "cunning," plays against 'arumim, "naked," of the previous verse.

2. As E. A. Speiser has noted, the subordinate conjunction that introduces the serpent's first utterance does not have the sense of "truly" that most translators assign it, and is better construed as the beginning of a (false) statement that is cut off in midsentence by Eve's objection that the ban is not on *all* the trees of the Garden.

3. But, as many commentators have observed, Eve enlarges the divine prohibition in another direction, adding a ban on touching to the one on eating, and so perhaps setting herself up for transgression: having touched the fruit, and seeing no ill effect, she may proceed to eat.

6 will become as gods knowing good and evil." And the woman saw that
the tree was good for eating and that it was lust to the eyes and the
tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she
7 also gave to her man, and he ate. And the eyes of the two were opened,
and they knew they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves and made
themselves loincloths.

8 And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the
garden in the evening breeze, and the human and his woman hid from
the LORD God in the midst of the trees of the garden. And the LORD
9 God called to the human and said to him, "Where are you?" And he
10 said, "I heard your sound in the garden and I was afraid, for I was
naked, and I hid." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked?
11 From the tree I commanded you not to eat have you eaten?" And the
12

6. *lust to the eyes*. There is a long tradition of rendering the first term here, *ta'awah*, according to English idiom and local biblical context, as "delight" or something similar. But *ta'awah* means that which is intensely desired, appetite, and sometimes specifically lust. Eyes have just been mentioned in the serpent's promise that they will be wondrously opened; now they are linked to intense desire. In the event, they will be opened chiefly to see nakedness. *Ta'awah* is semantically bracketed with the next term attached to the tree, "lovely," *nehmad*, which literally means "that which is desired."

to look at. A venerable tradition renders this verb, *lehaskil*, as "to make one wise." But Amos Funkenstein has astutely observed to me that there is an internal parallelism in the verse, "lust to the eyes . . . lovely to look at." Though the usual sense of *lehaskil* in the *hiphi'l* conjugation does involve the exercise of wisdom, Funkenstein's suggestion leans on the meaning of the same root in the *hitpa'el* conjugation in postbiblical Hebrew and Aramaic, "to look." And in fact, the Aramaic Targums of both Onkelos and Yonatan ben Uziel render this as *le'istakala beih*, "to look at." At least one other biblical occurrence is almost certainly in the sense of look, the beginning of Psalm 41: "Happy is he who *maskil* to the poor man"—surely, who looks at, has regard for, the poor man. A correlation between verbs of seeing and verbs of knowledge or understanding is common to many languages.

human said, "The woman whom you gave by me, she gave me from
the tree, and I ate." And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is
13 this you have done?" And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me
and I ate." And the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have
14 done this,

Cursed be you
of all cattle and all beasts of the field.
On your belly shall you go
and dust shall you eat all the days of your life.
Enmity will I set between you and the woman,
15 between your seed and hers.
He will boot your head
and you will bite his heel."

To the woman He said,

"I will terribly sharpen your birth pangs,
in pain shall you bear children.
And for your man shall be your longing,
and he shall rule over you."

12. *gave by me, she gave me*. The repeated verb nicely catches the way the first man passes the buck, not only blaming the woman for giving him the fruit but virtually blaming God for giving him the woman. She in turn of course blames the serpent. God's curse, framed in verse, follows the reverse order, from serpent to woman to man.

15. *Enmity*. Although the serpent is by no means "satanic," as in the lens of later Judeo-Christian traditions, the curse records a primal horror of humankind before this slithering, viscous-looking, and poisonous representative of the animal realm. It is the first moment in which a split between man and the rest of the animal kingdom is recorded. Behind it may stand, at a long distance of cultural mediation, Canaanite myths of a primordial sea serpent.

boot . . . bite. The Hebrew uses what appear to be homonyms, the first verb meaning "to trample," the second, identical in form, probably referring to the hissing sound of the snake just before it bites.

17 And to the human He said, "Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree that I commanded you, 'You shall not eat from it,'

Cursed be the soil for your sake,
with pangs shall you eat from it all the days of your life.

18 Thorn and thistle shall it sprout for you
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

19 By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread
till you return to the soil,
for from there were you taken,

for dust you are
and to dust shall you return."

17. *to the human.* The Masoretic Text vocalizes *le'adam* without the definite article, which would make it mean "to Adam." But since Eve in the parallel curse is still called "the woman," it seems better to assume the definite article here.

with pangs shall you eat. The noun *'itsavon* is the same used for the woman's birth pangs, confirming the lot of painful labor that is to be shared by man and woman.

18. The vista of thorn and thistle is diametrically opposed to the luscious vegetation of the garden and already intimates the verdict of banishment that will be carried out in verses 23-24.

And the human called his woman's name Eve, for she was the mother of all that lives. And the LORD God made skin coats for the human and his woman, and He clothed them. And the LORD God said, "Now that the human has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he may reach out and take as well from the tree of life and live forever." And the LORD God sent him from the garden of Eden to till the soil from which he had been taken. And He drove out the human and set up east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life.

20. *Eve . . . all that lives.* Like most of the explanations of names in Genesis, this is probably based on folk etymology or an imaginative playing with sound. The most searching explanation of these poetic etymologies in the Bible has been offered by Herbert Marks, who observes, "In a verisimilar narrative, naming establishes and fixes identity as something tautologically itself; etymology, by returning it to the trials of language, compromises it, complicates it, renders it potentially mobile." In the Hebrew here, the phonetic similarity is between *hawah*, "Eve," and the verbal root *hayah*, "to live." It has been proposed that Eve's name conceals very different origins, for it sounds suspiciously like the Aramaic word for "serpent." Could she have been given the name by the contagious contiguity with her wily interlocutor, or, on the contrary, might there lurk behind the name a very different evaluation of the serpent as a creature associated with the origins of life?

23. *the soil from which he had been taken.* This reminder of the first man's clayey creatureliness occurs as a kind of refrain in this chapter, first in the act of God's fashioning man, then in God's curse, and now in the banishment. It is a mere thing shaped from clay that has aspired to be like a god.

24. The cherubim, a common feature of ancient Near Eastern mythology, are not to be confused with the round-cheeked darlings of Renaissance iconography. The root of the term either means "hybrid" or, by an inversion of consonants, "mount," "steed," and they are the winged beasts, probably of awesome aspect, on which the sky god of the old Canaanite myths and of the poetry of Psalms goes riding through the air. The fiery sword, not mentioned elsewhere but referred to with the definite article as though it were a familiar image, is a suitable weapon to set alongside the formidable cherubim.