FIRST THINGS

MAN AND WOMAN: AN OLD STORY

by
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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? Which beliefs, customs, and institutions governing sexuality best promote their human flourishing?

These very basic questions are, nowadays, rarely asked, yet their subject is passionately and widely debated. Indeed, no important matter of human life generates today as much talk and controversy. Regrettably, much of our discussion of man and woman is not especially illuminating, because, being political and disputatious, it seeks victory rather than understanding. Traditional notions, held to be *merely* traditional, are in retreat, ironically, especially in religious institutions. In the academy, humanists are going wild over gender: legions of scholars are making their careers exposing the sexist bias of all European literature, philosophy, and theology, preaching the "cultural *construction*" of gender, or advancing the (anti-intellectual and self-undermining) doctrine that everyone's thinking is decisively determined by accidents of birth—not only gender, but also race and class. Politically correct thinking throughout our society denounces patriarchy, neuters pronouns and other allegedly sexist speech, integrates locker rooms, sends mothers of infants to

fight in Kuwait, and prosecutes vigorously yet almost always one-sidedly the war between—or is it now against?—the sexes.

On the venerable subject of man and woman, there are today—as there have always been—deep differences of opinion. Yet serious or thoughtful public examination of these opinions has become virtually impossible. Despite our constitutional protection of freedom of speech and despite our vaunted openness, we do not now enjoy a climate of opinion that encourages us to improve our opinions, or to replace them with knowledge or truth—partly because we have become too sophisticated to believe that there are any truths about this subject, separate, of course, from the ones which those in power allegedly "construct."

I am deeply saddened by this state of affairs, and I reject these assertions and this skepticism. For I think I know at least a few important truths about man and woman, and so do you. For one thing, every reader, whatever his or her beliefs, has a navel. Contemplate it: it offers clear proof that each of us is born of woman. Moreover, absent a miracle, each of us owes our living existence to exactly one man and one woman—no more, no less, no other—and, thus, to one act of heterosexual union. This is no social construction, it is natural fact, a fact older even than the human race. Another fact, this one nearly as old as the human race, is human self-consciousness regarding sexual difference and the difference it makes—and also the troubles it causes. Difficulties in *being* man or woman, like difficulties in *understanding* man and woman, are a very old story. Why? Because, as I will argue, of certain permanent and irreducible truths about man, woman, and sexuality as such.

To help us think about the old story of man and woman, I wish to consider a distinguished old story of man and woman, quite literally, their very first story, the story of the Garden of Eden. I do so for several reasons: First, to gain distance from current and more political controversies, the better to consider the basic questions. Second, to understand for myself how man and woman are regarded by our own religious tradition, whose prime story concerns primordial man and woman and their complex interactions. Understanding this tradition through

secondary sources is risky, especially today; for much of what is now said about the Bible in general and this story in particular—for example, that it is sexist, or that it justifies the subjugation of women—strikes me as either erroneous or shallow. Third, I examine this story to see whether and how it speaks truly, for I suspect that, like any great story, it is a repository of wisdom, or, better, can help us toward wisdom if we seriously think about its meaning.

Because my approach is somewhat unusual, I should make explicit *how* I intend to read this story. First, I will read it closely, literally, and straight, apart from all later commentary, Jewish or Christian, and apart from all the uses people have made of it. Second, I hope to read it without ideological commitments, especially on the subject of sex and gender. Third, I make no assumptions about who the author is or whether he was male or female; for I do not think it matters. For inasmuch as the text addresses our minds and hearts, inviting serious and sensitive reflection, it matters not who is speaking. If a thinker (or reader), whether male or female, feminist or misogynist, stumbles upon a truth about sex, it would still be truth, and the only way to know whether or not it is true is to think about it. Fourth, more generally, I believe this text can be read philosophically, i.e., in search of wisdom, without prior religious commitment; one need not be a believer either to understand what is being said, and why, or even to affirm or deny the truth of the account. In this respect, I read this book as I read any other great book: I assume that every word counts; I attend especially carefully to the sequence and the local context, in the belief that the meaning of each part is dependent partly on what comes before and after, both immediately and also remotely. As with any book, I seek to discover what it says and means and whether it speaks truly.

True, I face special difficulties reading the Bible this way, especially because one must eventually go one way or the other about the role of God—just as one must do, by the way, also regarding the role of Zeus and Apollo in the *Iliad*. True, especially after God begins to instruct Abraham in His chosen way, one cannot confirm or affirm on simply philosophical grounds the fact or the content of His special revelations. But, at least through the first eleven chapters of Genesis, I believe that one can learn much of what these stories teach by regarding God as nothing

more (but also nothing less) than the *ontological ground and support* for what is happening narratively. Not God as overwhelming and arbitrary power or as freely willing agent of intervention, but God as the source in being and/or goodness that "stands behind" or supports or clarifies the meaning of what comes to be and is. God in these stories speaks for being itself; His words and deeds help us to find and, even more, to rely on the reasonableness and soundness of what we learn from the stories.

The early chapters of Genesis (after the first one) present an account of human beginnings largely in temporal sequence, seemingly as an unfolding account of early human history. But—and this is probably the most important principle of my "method" of reading—I am convinced that the temporal account is also and more importantly a vehicle for conveying something atemporal and *permanent* about human life in the world. The narrative teaches about human beginnings in two other senses: first, it presents a universal anthropology (and even an ontology), showing the elements—the psychic and social beginnings—of human life as human, possibly true for all times and places. The first man and the first woman, and their descendants, are *prototypically*—and not just ancestrally—human. Second, because the anthropological account has a moral-political intention, the stories introduce us to human life in all its moral ambiguity; we are meant to learn which human elements cause what sorts of moral or political trouble and why. In this sense, the early chapters of Genesis begin the moral education of the reader.

The story of the Garden of Eden is, of course, not just about man and woman; on the contrary, their tale is overarched by a much larger theme: man's disobedience, the loss of innocence and the emergence of human freedom and moral self-consciousness, the loss of Eden and our entrance upon a burdened and painful mortal existence. Much of what I do here abstracts from these very important considerations. Yet I believe I include enough of the context to show why those massive themes are in fact intimately tied to the story of sex.

I

As our story opens, the earth is hard, dry, and lacking in vegetation; (1) we learn from the sta the earth needs both the rain of heaven and the workings of man. Even before we meet him, man is defined by his work, man has his work cut out for him: less the ruler over life, more the servant of the earth, man will till and toil, needily waiting for rain, anxious about the future. The story begins convincingly, conveying a nearly universal truth about human life. But *why* is this our life? What is responsible for its being so difficult? The sequel intends an answer.

A beginning clue may be contained in man's dual origins: he is constituted by two principles, one low ("dust of the earth"), one high ("breath of life"). The human being first comes to sight as a formed and animated (or breathing) dust of the ground. Higher than the earth, yet still bound to it, the human being has a name, *adam* (from *adamah,* meaning "earth" or "ground"), which reminds of his lowly terrestrial origins. Man is, from the start, up from below and in between.

What is he like, this prototypical human being? He is a simple being, with a simple soul, living a simple life. Upright, naked, ignorant, speechless, and innocent, he knows no complex or specifically human passions or desires: neither shame nor pride, anger nor guilt, malice nor vanity, wonder nor awe visit his soul. Having his simple desires—for food, for drink, for repose—simply met, he is content; with little gap between desire and fulfillment, he knows no self-division or self-consciousness. He appears to be like a grown-up child, or, perhaps, a hairless orangutan; a proto-human being, he is human only or mainly in looks. Solitary, free, and independent, enjoying what Rousseau would later call "the sentiment of existence," he lives only for himself, in a world that provides him peace, ease, and the satisfaction of his basic needs.

Man probably never lived in fact alone or in an edenic garden. Regardless, the story conveys truly a permanent aspect of our being. Whatever else human beings are or become, they are, always and at bottom, *also* beings with an uncomplicated, innocent attachment to their own survival and ease, beings who experience and feel, immediately and without reflection, the goodness of their own aliveness. This stratum of *animal* being—private bodily need, privately satisfied and enjoyed—is an ineradicable part of *human* being. All men know hunger, thirst, and fatigue. No man, no matter

how altruistic or saintly, meets his own hunger by putting food into someone else's mouth. Moreover, from the point of view of simple necessity—for food and drink—the world is a rather generous place; were it not for the depredations of civilized man, it would be so still. For many of our simpler relatives, including the primates, it remains in large measure a veritable garden; and it would still be so for us, had we never risen up from animality or childishness.

Yet the simple, primordial human being because he is primordially *human*—or perhaps, instead, *potentially* human—is not quite simple. As the story subtly suggests, there is something disquieting in his original nature. Some innate capacity or potential in the human soul dangerously threatens to upset the tranquility of man's simple and innocent life. For why else would there be need for a prohibition? Two possible sources of disturbance are identified, metaphorically, by the two special trees, which are distinguished from the trees good for food. (2:9) The tree of life, offering deathlessness, stands in the center of man's garden; man's immediate attachment to life implies an (at least) instinctive fear of death, which, becoming conscious, could and does greatly disturb man's tranquility.

But, from the Bible's point of view, even more disquieting is the possibility of human freedom, symbolized by the tree of knowledge of good and bad. Any free choice—which is, by definition, an act of non-obedience—means, implicitly, reaching for and acting on our own "knowledge" (or opinion) of good and bad, better and worse. For a human being—or even a proto-human being—as for any human child, the possibility of choosing for oneself lies always within reach. And, as every parent teaches, and as we children learn painfully by ourselves much later, a free choice is not necessarily a good choice, not even for oneself. The generous God paternalistically seeks to keep man from sacrificing his simple and innocent happiness; yet the need for such a restraint shows that the autonomous source of trouble lies already deep within. Moreover, man's ability to understand the prohibition, however partially, proves that he needs it; because he already has mind enough to distinguish the trees by name, he will soon enough have a mind of his own, and with it, the ability to make himself miserable.

(1)

Compare this with the watery and amorphous beginning of the so-called first creation story. Other important differences indicate that the second story is not simply a magnified and more detailed account of the creation of man already reported in Genesis 1. For example, the first story ends with man, the second begins with him. In the first, the animals come first and man is to be their ruler; in the second, the beasts come after, as possible companions. In the first, male and female are created together; in the second, sequentially, male first (see below). In the first, things are said to be "good"; in the second, there is a tree of knowledge of good and *bad,* and man's aloneness is said to be "not good." In the first, man is created straightaway in God's likeness; in the second, man *acquires* God-like qualities only at the end, and only in transgressing. (3:22) In the first, man is given a positive injunction, for fecundity and dominion; in the second, in need of restraint, he is given a negative commandment. The first story offers a cosmic vision and addresses us as spectators, majestically presenting our place in a cosmic whole; the second story maintains a strictly terrestrial focus and addresses us as suffering moral agents, poignantly presenting an account of how misery enters human life. The first story denies the divinity and demotes the status of the sun and the heavens; the second story shows the sad outcome of the natural human inclination to find our own way in the world exercising our reason and looking to "nature" for guidance. (See my essay, "Evolution and the Bible: Genesis I Revisited," *Commentary,* November 1988)

II

The itch in his soul that could destroy his contentment is, apparently, not yet manifest to the simple human being. Neither is a second difficulty: his aloneness. It is not man, but the Lord God who notices: "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a help opposite him *(ezer k'negdo).*" (2:18) As this observation leads to and explains the creation of woman, we need to consider its meaning more carefully.

Why and for whom is man's aloneness not good? Is it not good for the man or not good for the world around him or not good for God? Is it not good because of present circumstances or because of likely future possibilities? That is, might God he anticipating human death—which He had just mentioned as the inevitable consequence of gaining knowledge of good and bad—against which He will now provide the means of perpetuation? Much depends on how we understand man's solitariness.

It is common and appropriate to think that "alone" means "lonely" or "in need of assistance"; that is, that the "aloneness" is a badge of weakness. Weakness cries out for help, whether as companion, partner, or co-worker; and God in fact offers to make a "help" for the human being. But "alone" could also mean "self-sufficient" or "independent"; it could be a mark of apparent strength—real or imagined. Aloneness as strength and apparent self-sufficiency might he dangerous in a variety of ways: a solitary being, lacking a suitable mirror, might be incapable of self-knowledge; or, because seemingly independent, the solitary man, though he dwelt in the Lord's garden, might have no real awareness of the presence of God; (2) or, because seemingly self-sufficient, he might be inclined to test the limits—like the hero Achilles or like the original circle-men in Aristophanes' tale (in Plato's *Symposium*) of the birth of *eros*—seeking evidence for or against his own divinity. For "aloneness" as strength, the proper remedy is weakening, caused by division, opposition, conflict. Fittingly, God proposes an ambiguous helper. Man's helper is to be (in Hebrew) *neged,* i.e., *opposite* to him, *over against* him, *boldly in front* of him, *in his face:* the helper is to be (also? instead?) a *contra.* Putting together "partner" and "opposition," God proposes to make man a *counterpart.* What is called for, whatever the reason, is not just another, but an *other* other. Company here comes with difference; and *la difference* turns out to make a very big difference, both for good and ill.

(2)

Those who wish to claim that man before the coming of woman lived in company and harmony with God do not take sufficiently seriously God's (Being's) own testimony that man *was alone.* Put

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

III

The coming of woman inaugurates (if the account is read temporally) or embodies (if, as I prefer, the account is read ontologically or anthropologically) a new dimension of our humanity, comprising augmented powers of reason and speech, higher levels of self-awareness, and genuine sociality rooted in sexual difference and attraction—all in one package. Man's difference from the animals is decisively a matter of sexual self-awareness; this new divided consciousness (gradually) separates man from the (merely) animal way of life, represented by the solitary human being considered to this point. But, as we shall see, sexuality and sexual awareness have several distinct elements (or "stages"), even now recognizable and, to a degree, separable ("recapitulated") in the emerging human sexuality surrounding puberty. The primary element is not uniquely human.

To prepare him for the appropriate counterpart, man's desire for company is stimulated by his encounter with the animals. His dormant powers of reason—which is, at bottom, the capacity to separate and combine, to see otherness and sameness—are awakened by this confrontation; the names he gives the animals may he arbitrary, but the differences ratified by the different names are not. But this is not merely a disinterested exercise in taxonomy; his powers of discernment turn back upon himself, with feeling. As a result, he gains the first germ of self-consciousness: I am not alone; but I am different from them; they are different from me, indeed, too different to satisfy my newly awakened desire for a fitting counterpart. "But for the human being there was not found a help opposite him." (2:20)

In the immediate sequel, God creates the 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. The necessary duality is produced from within. True, the surgery is less drastic than that symmetrical hemisection performed by Apollo on the original circle-men in Aristophanes' tale, each half then longing to find and unite sexually with its missing other half. But surgery it is, and the original man is no longer what he was; he is no longer whole. The original and amorphous stirrings of restlessness (freedom? loneliness? ambition? fear?) are, as we shall see, to he replaced by focused desire.

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; presumably the woman made from the rib is not in any way deformed. Besides, the difference in origin may betoken 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-preservation has nothing whatsoever to do with sex. The original human being—and, more important, 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 know nothing of his maleness or its meaning, the first human being seems to have been male. And, be this as it may, it is certainly with a *sense* of his own 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, now (or, 'at last'; literally, 'the time,' *hapaam)* is hone of my bone and flesh of my flesh; and this shall be called woman *(ishah)* because from man *(ish)* this was taken." (2:23)

The appearance of the woman prompts the first full human sentence, indeed, the first speech of any human being directly quoted in the text. Man's counterpart stirs his soul to new powers and insights. The man sees the woman as both same and other: as she stands before and against him, he also sees *himself* for the first time. As a result, he now names himself: no longer *adam,* generic human-being-from-the-earth, but *ish,* individual male human being, man as male in relation to female woman. The woman, *ishah,* gets from the man the lexically derivative name; her name, like her origin, is derivative. Yet her place in this speech of self-discovery and self-naming is, in fact, first: only because the woman stands first before him and comes first to mind is he able to know and name himself. This deep and far-reaching insight about complementarity and selfhood is beautifully conveyed by the text: in the man's speech, *ishah,* although lexically derivative, is spoken first.

Let us look more closely at the man's first speech, regarded as an expression of first desire or, if you will, the germ of love. Though he acknowledges the woman's otherness, he is here much more impressed by her similarity; indeed, he exaggerates and treats similarity as sameness: "This is my flesh and bone; this is mine; this is me." His 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 literally self-ish: the other appears lovable because it is (regarded as) same, because it is (or seems to be) oneself. This love seeks merging, re-union, fusion, as the narrator (interrupting) says, "Therefore a man *(ish)* leaves his father and his mother and cleaves unto his wife: *that they may become as one flesh.*" (3) (2:24; emphasis added)

This primordial aspect of sexuality is ubiquitous and well-known. 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. It is a stirring in 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, sexual lust 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, that 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, against 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 a literary vehicle for suggesting and communicating basic natural differences in 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 most important matters would certainly want to consider, without prejudice, whether male and female desire were, and are, to *begin with* (i.e., 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.

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. Success for the female 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 billions of sperm. Part of the most effective strategy would be 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. These differences regarding the gametes are, no doubt, correlated with differences in body structure and function, and also, more to our point, with differences of soul. 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 and 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.

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, other aspects of specifically human sexuality can and (as we shall soon see) 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 lust for union—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 gender differences in desire, there is—now returning 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 allegedly liberated now say, no big deal. Lust comes naturally (what could be bad?): "and they were both naked the man *(adam)* and his wife *(ishtoh),* and were not ashamed." (2:25) This lack of shame, too, was natural, as shamelessness is with all the other animals. Sexual self-consciousness was still a thing of the future; likewise, all matters of moral judgment. For now, just fuse and be glad.

(3)

This interruption of the narrative seems to me best understood as a moral gloss not on monogamy but on the love of your own, which, strictly speaking, means incest, including parent-child incest. The narrator makes clear that love of your own flesh does not—i.e., should not—lead to incest, as it does among our primate forebears.

IV

Before moving on to consider the next aspect of the unfolding account of man and woman, I pause for a brief and necessarily very partial treatment of the notorious conversation between the serpent and the woman. The force of this first conversation, begun by the Bible's first question, is to call into question authority and obedience; by challenging the goodness (3:1) and the truthfulness (3:4) of the author, by denying the announced consequences of disobedience (3:4-5), and by suggesting attractive alternative benefits of eating (i.e., goods beyond food and sex, namely, godlikeness though knowledge [3:5]), speech and reason erode the force of the prohibition. (4)

Once the prohibition is undermined, once reason awakens, *simple* obedience—whether to God or to fixed instinct—becomes impossible. The imagination is liberated by and in the assertion of the possibility of "Not": things may not be what they seem—even better, things need not be as they are. With alternatives now freely before her, the woman's desire grows on its own, partially enticed by the serpent's promise of wisdom, mostly fueled by her newly empowered imagination:

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

The woman "sees" in a new light, and for the first time mind and desire both color and reflect the new powers of imagination, powers that mark a giant step on the road to humanization—in all its pathos and ambiguity.

We must try to ignore all latter-day commentary and its harsh negative judgment on the deed of woman—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. Unlike the man, with his desires sexually fixated upon the woman, the woman is here more open to the world—to beauty and to the possibility of wisdom. She has more than sex on the brain. Her aspirations, however diffuse in direction, however ambiguous in result, are the first specifically *human* longings. Precisely because her *eros* is less focused and 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)

(4)

This episode, which prepares the transgression, is, among other things, a mordant reflection on speech and reason; speech is shown to be a vehicle of both mischief and misunderstanding. The serpent's first question—"Yea, hath God said: Ye shall not eat of *any (mikol)* tree of the garden?"—implies that God might be the sort of malicious being who arbitrarily keeps from his creatures *all* life-sustaining food. In his next speech, he calls God a liar. The woman, for her part, also says the thing which is not, albeit in innocence: she answers not the question that was asked, says more than was called for, identifies the forbidden tree as the one "in the midst of the garden," adds "neither shall ye touch it" to the prohibition, and, most importantly, converts the predicted *consequences* of disobedience ("for in the day thou eatest thereof, dying you will die"; 2:17) into the *reason* for obedience ("Ye shall not eat of it . . . *lest* you die"; 3:3). When the serpent denies that death will follow eating, the woman no longer has any reason to obey—having forgotten that obedience to the command was itself the reason. Thus, we have here a prototypical "triumph" of free, calculating rationality, liberating itself from the command of necessity (or instinct or nature or Being or God).

V

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 God, knowing good and evil." (3:5) But, as the biblical author points out, with irony, their eyes were opened instead to the knowledge of their nakedness, which now becomes a source of shame and distress. They saw things as they really were: they noticed what had hitherto escaped notice; or, perhaps, they now understood the meaning of what had merely been seen. But irony notwithstanding, we must

ponder the suggestion 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 is awareness of it shameful? How does this awareness and our response to it alter the relationship between man and woman?

To be naked means, of course, to be defenseless, unguarded, 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 permanent incompleteness. 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 unification. Neither are we internally whole. 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 also by the *way* we need and are needed by the sexual other. Later, on further reflection, we might even discover that the genitalia are a sign of our perishability, 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 to our own insufficiency, dependence, perishability, animality, self-division, and lack of self-command, we manifest a further difficulty, the difficulty of self-consciousness itself. For a peculiarly human doubleness is now present in the soul, through which we 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 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, we cannot hide from ourselves, when we see ourselves being seen by the other, the painful awareness of our own inadequacies and weaknesses. We are ashamed.

The emergence of shame and sexual self-consciousness—mutually and equally, it should he 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 the heart of the other. Each seeks approval, praise, respect, esteem—perhaps, 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 and negotiate this distance and its closure. And yet, the friendship of the lovers remains inherently problematic: on the one side, difference, dependence, and demand; on the other side, the wish for approbation earned and freely given. 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. 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, both a covering over or dissimulation and also an adornment and beautification, 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. One can hardly exaggerate the importance of this moment. Kant has captured it, economically and profoundly, in his "Conjectural Beginning of Human History."

> 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.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 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, if not solely, to one another. They turn inward, "we two against a sea of troubles." Mutual self-help and self-reliance are the order of the day. Love, born of wounded pride, still bears the marks and concerns of the proud. These marks and concerns painfully complicate the story of man and woman, as Rousseau (more astute than his high-minded "student," Kant) notes, addressing precisely this same transformation of human love in his *Second Discourse*:

> The 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 horn 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 made themselves girdles, the man and the woman show their first real openness to or awareness of the divine. Immediately after clothing themselves, reports the biblical author (3:8), "they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the Garden," the first explicit mention that any human being *really* attended to or even noticed the divine presence. In recognizing our lowliness we can also discover what is truly high.

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

VI

The ensuing conversation with this transcendent voice is, on its face, hardly encouraging; God conducts an inquest, extracts a confession, pronounces sentence. New passions emerge in the human soul, most notably a higher kind of shame, (5) guilt, and that remarkable mixture of fear-and-reverence called awe. Shame implies the peculiarly human concern with self-perfection, guilt the sense of personal responsibility, whereas awe recognizes powers not under human control and beyond human comprehension, before which we feel shamefully small. We cannot here attempt a full analysis of the text; we shall concentrate only on those aspects that concern the relation of man and woman. But we observe, in passing, the major features of the new human condition, announced and foretold in God's speech to the newly awakened pair, within which the story of man and woman will hereafter—and irreversibly—unfold. (1) There is the (partial) estrangement of humankind from the world (or nature), evidenced by (a) enmity between serpent and woman; (b) partial alienation of man from the earth, upon which he must now toil for his food; and (c) pain of childbirth, implying conflict even within the (female) human body. (2) There is division of labor, defined relative to work: the one gives birth, the other tills, (3) There is the coming of the arts and crafts: no more just picking fruit and gathering nuts, but agriculture—the artful cultivation of the soil, the harvesting of grain, its transformation into flour, the making of bread, and, eventually, also astronomy (to know the seasons and to plan for sowing), metallurgy (to make the tools), the institution of property (to secure the fruits of one's labor), and religious sacrifices (to placate the powers above and to encourage rain). (4) And there is rule and authority. To sum it up in one word: civilization. The "punishment" for trying to rise above animality is to be forced to live like a human being.

The so-called "punishment" seems to fit the so-called "crime," in at least two ways. If the crime of transgression represents the human aspiration to self-sufficiency and godliness (free choice necessarily implying humanly grounded knowledge of good and bad), the so-called punishment thwarts that aspiration by opposition: human beings instead of self-sufficiency receive estrangement, dependence, division, and rule. Second, and more profound, the so-called punishment punishes fittingly by making clear the unanticipated meaning of the choice and desire

implicit in the transgression itself. Like Midas with his wish for the golden touch, like Achilles with his desire for glory, the prototypical human being gets precisely what he reached for only to discover that it is not exactly what he wanted. He learns, through the revealing conversation with God, that his choice for humanization, wisdom, knowledge of good and bad, or autonomy really means at the same time also estrangement from the world, self-division, division of labor, toil, fearful knowledge of death, and the institution of inequality, rule, and subservience. Indeed, I am inclined to think that the so-called punishment is not really a newly instituted condition that a willful God introduces against the human grain, but rather a making clear of just what it means to have chosen enlightenment and freedom, just what it means to be a *rational* being. The punishment, if punishment it is, consists mainly in the acute *foreknowledge* of our now natural destiny to live out our humanity under the human condition.

Central to this bittersweet foreknowledge is a new dimension—or, rather, a new awareness of a hitherto invisible dimension—to the meaning of our sexual being: sex means generativity. Beyond lust for union and beyond romance, the meaning of man and woman has much to do with children, whether we know it or not. This aspect of the story of man and woman —and especially our awareness of it—gravely complicates the picture, introducing further new prospects, on the one hand, for divergence and conflict, 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. Why is human childbirth painful? Largely because of the disproportion between the child's large human head and the relatively small birth canal. The human capacity for reason and freedom, embraced in the "transgressive" rise to humanhood and embodied in the enlarged cranium, 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 powers made possible by his large head,

reaches for his own autonomous knowledge of good and had, 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 this vexed passage, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over you"? Many contemporary readers see here the arbitrary institution of patriarchy: a sexist text, written by males to justify the domineering ways of man toward woman, shamelessly invokes the divine will to support the male prerogative, held to be legitimate because it was womanly weakness that cost man immortal bliss. Such readers read tendentiously and thoughtlessly. Let us consider another alternative, which takes the story to be more descriptive than prescriptive, and which therefore reads God's speech as *revealing prophecy* rather than as justifying punishment.

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 the young, she feels sooner, more acutely, and more powerfully than the man an attachment to her own young. Precisely because her love may now be said to be divided (between her children and her husband), paradoxically, her now focused love for her children causes her desire also for her husband to grow more focused and more intense. Whereas, as lustful, man looked fixedly at woman (any woman?) as his missing bodily half, woman, as generative, turns her broader desire on her particular husband as provider for and protector of 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? Domesticate him, perhaps by offering him or allowing him to rule—or to appear to rule. Or, more likely, once domesticated, he may simply *take* power, being physically stronger. To be sure, this is not a matter of conscious scheming or explicit contract. Rather, the text

suggests, nature itself as generative "conspires" and beguiles in this direction, and arranges things in this new, more permanent, and seemingly hierarchical way.

Division of labor, implicit in generation and therefore in sexual difference as such, would, by itself, sow seeds of conflict. Especially if one's work reflects, expresses, and also fosters differences of body and soul, different work means at least partly different outlooks and sensibilities. From differences of outlook come differences of opinion and interest. This possibility of conflict of interest 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, the genuine ruler rules 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. True, in the absence of children, greater male strength might simply have led to dominance on the basis of lust and might. Against this background, both the woman's desire for her husband, and his need through support to prove himself worthy of her desire, 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 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 do indeed show the great dangers of male domination and exploitation of women. For example, we have 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. Or we note with disgust the predatory behavior of Pharaoh who rounds up beautiful women for his harem (12:14-15). Or, again, there is Lot's sacrificing his daughters to the Sodomites (19:8) or the Hivite prince's rape of Dinah (34:2). Indeed, 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, through education—beginning with Abraham's trip to Egypt where he learns that God abhors the Pharaoh's treatment

of women and that He defends the virtue of Sarah, the singular wife and future matriarch. 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; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (3:17-19)

Sorrow, sweat, toil, and death: the dusty earth opposes his needs, resists his plow, and, finally, devours him whole. 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.

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).*

The man hears the prophecy of the hardship and trouble that he unwittingly purchased with his enlightenment, but he does not despair. 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 force, with powers he can only look up to in awe and gratitude. 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. (6) This, far more than the burdensome promise of rule, will attach the man devotedly to the woman. This will or should soften arbitrariness and moderate opposition. Children, a good now common to each, 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. Gender duality, which first drew man's love upward and outside of himself (and 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 forward to the household, to that first institution of humanity that is devoted finally to rearing the next generation. As Rousseau would put it centuries later, describing this aspect of nascent humanity:

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

True, the innocence of this picture, though genuine, is partial and misleading. There are, as already noted, seeds of future trouble, which 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.

The implications of these divisions become thematic in the subsequent tales in Genesis; controversies springing from them trouble us to the present day, and, in my view, will continue to do so indefinitely. Still, 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.

It would be false to the Torah to leave matters here, though we are obliged to do so for now. 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, were we to 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 would discover immediately the dangers of woman's pride in her child-bearing powers and of jealous sibling rivalry to the point of fratricide. Throughout the book of Genesis, we 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 first-born must be circumcised in the covenant, and his love for the long-awaited Isaac must be subordinated to his reverence for the Lord—precisely to prove that he is fit to be the father of his people. Yet it was the miraculously delivered promise of a son to Abraham and Sarah—and God's refusal to allow his sacrifice—that completed 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.

(5)

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

(6)

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 them. But as the sequel shows, the woman revels in her exalted status as creator: upon the birth of Cain, the first horn, it is Eve who boasts of her creative power while Adam is speechless, and Cain hears the name of her pride. See my essay, "A Woman for All Seasons," *Commentary,* September 1991.

VII

What have we learned from this old story about man and woman? 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 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 concern for lineage and hope for transcendence—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.

Beyond this counsel of moderation, we gather some psychosocial suggestions, positive and negative. For example, we come to understand the importance of modesty and shame for the cultivation of lasting love; for when the mutual and willing exposure of nakedness is understood by each as a gift to one's beloved and is received gladly and without contempt, love declares itself triumphantly indifferent to our frailty and finitude. Or we see why deliberately childless unions, or marriageless childbearing, or the sexual revolution, or women's liberation, or unisexuality in looks and deeds, or the absence of courtship, or prenuptial contracts, or no-fault divorce, or our willful insistence solely on personal self-fulfillment might weaken commitments, encourage male

predation, and leave women more vulnerable and children more neglected. And, finally, we begin to see why it is complementarity—the heterosexual difference—and not just doubleness that may point the way to human flourishing altogether.

To develop this last, most positive suggestion requires that we read much more of the Torah; yet this first story provides some hints. Despite all the dangers that accompany the humanization of sexuality, we see through this story a possible direction toward human fulfillment. Conscious love of the complementary other draws the soul outward and upward; in procreation, love 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—yes, even in modern times. 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)

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