The social psychology of Adam and Eve

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The story of Adam and Eve contains a memorably succinct anthropology. The text of Genesis is not only a religious explanation of the origins of humankind but also a narratively integrated set of empirically verifiable, universal claims about human nature. Especially applicable to emotions as they arise and subside in everyday life, the myth is presented as a fascinating legal drama.

In this article, I suggest that we revisit the biblical text from a sociological perspective for several reasons. First, the story of Adam and Eve is extraordinarily successful. It is beyond my competence to suggest that there are comparable myths outside of Occidental cultures, but in the West, Genesis, as conveyed through official teachings, folklore, and artistic conventions, has found primordial appeal across enormously varied cultural turfs. The social psychology that may be gleaned from the text might reveal a somewhat larger audience and application than is usually the case for sociology.

The second reason is that this myth captures dimensions of experience that are difficult to keep under systematic consideration when emotional life is represented in the idioms of contemporary social science. Like many myths, the story of Adam and Eve is about metamorphosis, about change in the embodied foundations of human being. Mythic imaging can help us consider how our emotional life may be literally and not simply figuratively a process of metamorphosis in which we change the sensed body that is the vehicle of our actions, our being. Otherwise the vocabulary we conventionally use to refer to the subjects we study — "actors, persons, selves, members, individuals" — may, unless we take special caution, quickly turn our ideas away from perceiving those subjects as creatures whose very being changes — the
being that produces the actions and the identities that we seek to understand.\textsuperscript{2}

Myths are stories and their narrative character is especially valuable for sociological theory. When they describe metamorphoses, myths capture processes of transformation to a radically altered condition; in so doing they make central just what much of contemporary social analysis, in focusing on correlations with different states, ignores. Emotions flow with striking fluidity and in momentary episodes from one state to another, from laughter to crying, from humiliation to rage, from embarrassment to laughter to anger. Such transformations are virtually never addressed in sociology, not even among students of micro social process and notwithstanding the recent enthusiasm for studying emotions.

The third reason for making so much of the Fall is its value as a theoretical paradigm: the story economically presents central substantive themes in the sociology of emotions. To start, Genesis locates the sources and dangers of emotional life dialectically, in the emergence of human identity as reflexive self-consciousness. Then the tale emphasizes the moral dimension of emotions, locates shame – and by implication the person’s relationship to community – as the ground of all emotions, and points to the dualistic nature of emotional life.

In the histories of both theology and sociological research, the theme of dualism has been perhaps the most difficult to grasp. There is a recurrent bias in the telling of the story that emphasizes the Fall and neglects the act of grace with which it draws to a close. What Max Scheler termed “body shame” is readily appreciated in social research,\textsuperscript{3} just as it is frequently depicted in artistic versions of Adam and Eve frantically covering their genitals and fleeing Eden in fear. But what Scheler called spiritual shame is also part of the tale, and this part of our emotional experience is more delicate and less commonly acknowledged. The story in Genesis of the emergence of human identity points to a social psychology that can document our own everyday corporeal awakenings to the dialectical and dualistic range of emotional experience.

But which Genesis story should we examine? The text referred to here will be found in any copy of the Christian reconstructed Revised Standard Version and is not different, in any respect that is significant for my arguments, from a recent English translation that attempts to restore the poetic sensibility of the Hebrew bible.\textsuperscript{4} But Genesis contains two versions of creation, the first running from 1:1–2:3, the second from 2:4–24. In several important respects there are tensions, if not outright contradictions, between them. In tone, the first is emphatically positive, describing God characterizing his several creations, including humankind, as unqualifiedly “very good.”\textsuperscript{5} In the second version, we find prohibition, transgression, and sneaky creatures, both animal and human. In the first, God creates humankind in His own image; in the second, Adam and Eve re-create themselves to be, in the words of the serpent, “as God.”

The reference in this article is not to one or the other of the two (probably corporate) authors of the creation stories but to the text of the “redactor” who combined them and, most directly, to the living legacy of the tale that integrates elements of both.\textsuperscript{6} The redactor’s text, and the widely dispersed imagery that became the living Bible, does not attempt to resolve these contradictions formally. Instead, the two narrative segments exist in a dialectical relationship, and as such they parallel the dialectics that are the essence of the second, the “J” or “Yahweh” version.\textsuperscript{7} The text formed a new balance between the personal and the transcendent qualities of the deity…. It was a balance that none of the individual authors had intended. But that balance, intended or not, came to be at the heart of Judaism and Christianity.\textsuperscript{8}

Any adequate theory of this human creation story should be able to provide coherent answers to the following questions:

- Why were there two trees, and just those two trees, that were placed off limits to Adam and Eve?
- Why was Eve formed? And why from Adam’s rib?
- Why was it a serpent that led Eve to transgress? And why didn’t the snake eat?
- Why was the transgression one of eating rather than gazing on the forbidden? Why was the critical act one of reaching up, rather than, say, excavating below?
- Why did eating the forbidden fruit have the discrete effect of “opening their eyes,” and in what sense?
- Why did both Adam and Eve eat, and why did Eve’s awakening not occur until Adam also ate?
- Why does the opening of their eyes instantly bring them the knowledge that they were both naked?
- Why did they then cover their genitals?
How could Adam and Eve have been guilty of eating the forbidden fruit, when their knowledge of good and evil emerged only in the eating itself?

Why did God give them animal skins to replace the fig leaves they had employed to cover their genitals?

Why does Adam name his mate twice, first Woman and then, only after transgression and punishment, Eve?

More generally, how were Adam and Eve, and how also was God transformed by the events in Eden?

To answer these questions, I consider the story as presenting a "case" against Adam and Eve. Thus, my discussion is organized in four parts: a complaint, a defense, a sentencing stage, and an opinion or explanation of what the story conveys in its totality. My use of the format of a case-at-law is not simply a rhetorical device. Westermann, for example, notes the use in Genesis of "a structure that follows universal legal process." Historically, the meaning of the myth lived in a mixture of implications for political geography, theology, jurisprudence, and what we would term the social sciences. In recent years, scholars have made great progress in documenting the original geo-political significance of biblical stories. Here I offer a first-level analysis of the myth as a legal drama, and a second-level analysis as a social psychology.

The case against Adam and Eve

The first question we may properly ask about any prosecution is the gravamen of the offense. Presuming that the reported acts occurred, what essentially was the transgression? This inquiry directs attention away temporarily from the accused and turns it toward the accusation. Just what in the conduct of Adam and Eve was improper? On what theory was the prohibition based? What was the purpose of the interdict?

We note first that the transgression was a trespass against a tree whose fruit was protected by divine wrath. This narrative device is not uncommon in myth systems. But the tree in question was not of eternal life (although it is of critical importance that there is a second sacred tree in Eden, later also put off-limits, that did bear fruit giving eternal life); nor a tree whose fruits would establish one's beauty or social status (as in familiar Greek myths); nor a tree whose fruit once bitten would subdue consciousness by inducing sleep (as in still-popular fairy tales); nor a tree whose fruit, once eaten, would make one good or evil. The sacred fruit was a peculiarly intellectual specimen, a tree of the "knowledge of" good and evil.

Read closely, the prohibition is not of doing evil but of acquiring knowledge of good and evil. It is a quality of consciousness that had been put off limits. A faculty and a status that are customarily treated as higher, the faculty of valutative knowing and the status of the judge looking down on the adjudged, had been placed in a sacred reserve, through an act of divine legislation, handed down from on high. Why? An initial answer is already available: because knowledge of good and evil would elevate the subjects, putting them on a par, at least in one respect, with the law-giver.

The "knowledge of good and evil" is not a narrow moral conscience. Commentators, interpreting the Hebrew tov (or tob) and ra in historical context, have understood "good and evil" as value-opposites, such that the phrase comprehends all that is desirable and all that is undesirable, meaning that the prohibited knowledge is a ubiquitous moral awareness.

The knowledge gained is not omniscient but, as Bonhoeffer explained, a specifically dialectical knowledge, a bittersweet awareness of the evil in good and an inspiring appreciation of the good in evil:

Tob and ra are the categories for the deepest division of human life in every respect. The essential thing about them is that they appear as a pair and that, in their state of division, they belong inseparably together ... the painful, the evil, does not exist without a glimmer of pleasure, which makes pain wholly pain ... Tob, the pleasurable, the good, the beautiful does not exist without being constantly submerged in ra, the painful, evil, mean, impure ... [And] exactly what is painful in pleasure? It is that in all pleasure man desires eternity, and that he knows pleasure is transitory and has an end.

Further, if the "knowledge" that Adam and Eve acquire is "of" dialectically related values, this knowledge is not morally indifferent or disinterested: it is self-indicative, resulting immediately in a rejection of self. Despite the possibilities that the plot affords, there is no conflict between Adam and Eve; neither immediately blames the other; each first turns against him or herself. That the knowledge is self-knowledge can be seen in the effects of the illicit eating; they each turn their regard toward their own genitals and reveal "knowledge" of their own nakedness. This is the experience of shame. The forbidden fruit is the very process of self-conscious reflection.
In self-reflection, Adam and Eve do not turn to regard the hand that picked the fruit, nor do they probe their mouths to question the organ that completed the transgression. Their turn is toward the genitals, which here figure not simply as erotic organs but as the provocative center of creativity, the organs of human genesis. Having acquired the capacity of self-reflection, the now-human Adam and Eve can begin to generate their own story. They have challenged God’s previously unparalleled status as the creator who worked alone all through the first chapter of Genesis. By eating the forbidden fruit, they have been transformed from creatures to creators.\textsuperscript{12}

Adam and Eve gained a self-reflexive way of knowing that changed the substance of their being. The forbidden stuff that they consume is neither an abstraction nor a thing. The prohibition is not about looking at or throwing stones at the sacred fruit, or about opening and reading a sacred text; it is about an eating. Whatever the moral of the tale, it describes a metamorphosis, the birth of new powers and possibilities through a bodily transformation.\textsuperscript{13}

Immediately the story appears to explain the origins of the distinctive nature of human being. The forbidden food was growing up in a tree, not directly on top of the ground, much less in a subterreanean world; the transgressors had to reach up to get the fruit, not down in the exploration of some preexisting, subconscious realm. A certain hubris was involved in the transgression; its immediate result was an elevation of the original couple’s nature, not the revelation of something they had possessed and that had been kept hidden.

Here we may detail the role of the serpent. The snake is the animal that was closest to the humans before the transgression. Adam had given names to all the animals, but only the snake talked in return. And, although the snake tempts Eve to eat, the snake does not himself even touch, much less eat the forbidden fruit, an act that would have put him on a parallel with humankind. Unusually close to Adam and Eve before the transgression, his distance from human being is made definitive afterward in the punishment he receives. At the start of the history, Adam is ambiguously related to animals and God, not sharply divided from either; at the end of the narrative, there is a clear tripartite division of being, with sharp separations between God and man on the one hand, and man and animals on the other. The events of Genesis send Adam and Eve out to wander for a new home, but fix the animals uniformly in their lowly place. The vertical spatial metaphor throughout the story repeatedly emphasize this stratification.

A complementary anthropological point is conveyed by the “subtleness” of the snake. The phallic figure of the snake has a lively place in the narrative, but it is secondary and supportive of the primary theme of the acquisition of moral self-consciousness. The snake’s identity is one of many indications that the forbidden acquisition is not just moral knowledge but a dialectical consciousness of self.\textsuperscript{14} The serpent is not Satan. “What distinguishes it a little from the rest of animals is exclusively its greater cleverness.”\textsuperscript{15} True, the snake, referred to in the masculine, tempts Eve, not Adam, to take the fruit, and this supports a reading of the Fall as a sexual act (cf. Graves: “In the original myth serpent was the male factor that impregnated the Great Mother who arose from Chaos.”)\textsuperscript{16} But the matter is more complex, and the story’s sexual imagery has existential rather than simply sensual connotations.

Despite pro- and anti-patriarchal readings, the text confounds gender-based attributions of fault and the condemnation of sexual appetite.\textsuperscript{17} Was it Eve who was the prime mover, or was it the male principle, represented by the snake, who tempted Eve? And to the extent Eve was at fault, was she not an extrusion of Adam’s nature? The possibilities quickly become dizzying.

The problems with imputing blame either to gender or to sex are systematic; they are due to the centrality of the dialectical theme. The snake is unique among flora and fauna, but not because it looks the most like the male genitals; there are many plants with sexual parts that resemble the full complement of male genitalia, and many ambulant animals have faces that when inverted can lead one to see eyes as testicles and nose as phallus.\textsuperscript{18} However phallic the snake may be in outline, it is dialectical in practice: it turns on itself. The seductive animal is called serpent in Genesis, “more subtle than any beast of the field”; in its movements, it is dramatically self-reflexive, generating its movement by acting against itself.

Note the contrast drawn here with Adam’s original nature. Adam, from the Hebrew adama, is earth, formed of dust. Like the beasts of the field, man moves by opposing his form to gravity; we push against the earth to progress in life. But the serpent is that strange creature, neither beast of the field nor bird, that moves by pushing off himself, gliding over the earth but not quite flying. Like consciousness, the snake’s method of movement exists always close to but always floating just above the material world. What better figurative device could be drawn from the living world to point man’s way toward his distinctive mental life?
Insofar as the snake represents sex, it sets up another dialectical relation with Eve (a "he," the snake has nothing to do directly with Adam). In other words, even to the extent that the snake indicates sex, sex in turn is a dialectic of embodied consciousness, not simply in a metaphorical sense but as a lived reality. If the serpent in relation to Eve "represents" sex, the process of seduction also represents opposites that are in tension but inexplicably attracted. Indeed, if we ask, "What makes sex so interesting?" the inquiry leads to an appreciation of sex as, at the same time, a reaching out to the other and a means of revealing and touching otherwise hidden features of one's identity.

Adam and Eve's "offense" was becoming human. Their transformation was at once an intellectual, emotional, and moral metamorphosis. In one indivisible, fateful moment, each acquired (1), a cognitive capacity—the "knowledge of" good and evil; (2), a moral capacity—it is the knowledge of "good and evil"; and (3), an emotional life—shame emerges in an unprecedented turn to self.

The three dimensions flow together in the story, as they do in everyday human behavior. Before eating, they saw objects, each other, the nakedness of the other, and the other's seeing of their nakedness; and they were not ashamed. Now they see with a prismatic perception that refractions observation back to the self in affective colors. Prismatic vision has three revolutionary qualities. First, it is self-commenting. Adam's vision has itself become a matter of his awareness; now he not only sees, he becomes aware that his gaze is his construction. Second, vision is now moral. Adam has cause for shame, not only in his nakedness but for his look, which constructs Eve's shameful nakedness. Third, this visual power is a tactile force. Adam experiences his vision not primarily visually but as a feeling; his vision touches him, retracting itself to him in shame.

The sociological implications of this transformation are decisive. There now can be no vision of another without a reflective construction of an image that one should have as a seer, as one who exists for the other. The upshot of this morally reflexive vision of the objective world is a sudden disappearance of the prior parasiadic community with the other and the emergent awareness of the impossibility of a radical separation of self and other, of subjectivity and objectivity, of observation and judgment.

This helps explain what seems to be a narrative leap in the story. There is no break between their ingestion of the fruit and the turn of their attention to their nakedness. The story is clear that no one has as yet seen their transgression nor viewed them as naked, so their perception of their nakedness does not flow as an extension from someone else's perception of them. They do not look about randomly, happen upon a reflecting pool, and by chance locate their nakedness in their field of vision. They must regard their nakedness as a reflection of the new aspect that the fruit and the world of which it is part have taken on.

Because a portrait of one's own subjectivity is implicit in one's perception of all objects, there is no need for an intermediary narrative step in the progression from the act of eating to the self-attentive project of constructing a girdle (in some translations, an "apron") of fig leaves. Unlike the common theoretical statements of the place of the self in social interaction, which artificially impute a transitional stage between perception and responsive behavior, self-evaluation and behavioral response are treated in Genesis as a natural upshot of perceiving/acting. Adam and Eve turn back on themselves, not through "thinking" or reflecting in some moment isolated from action, but by seeing themselves as intolerably naked and sewing girdles of fig leaves, that is, by attempting to return to being organically intertwined in the world.

Notice the care with which an interactionist sensitivity has been crafted into the account. The story carefully holds back shameful self-regard from each until both have eaten. Eve's ingestion was not sufficient for her shameful awareness of self as naked. Before, she could see both her nakedness and his. But she could not see her seeing of his nakedness, nor did she sense shame in his seeing of her nakedness. But when Adam eats, their prismatic perception arises instantly and together. Why should Eve's capacity of shameful self-regard await Adam's eating? Because she can only reflect on herself the perspective of another self-reflecting being.

Notice also the stress given to the embodied character of reflexive vision. George Herbert Mead came close to capturing the ontogenesis of the self as a collective product by insisting that self-definition depends on taking the perspective on oneself of another. But Mead's analysis was too abstracted from embodied knowledge, too reliant on what subsequent commentary came to call a realm of "symbolic" interaction. Adam and Eve take on new qualities, not by seeing and being struck by a thought, but through eating. The theoretical point is that all
perception is sensually achieved; what we know does not somehow simply enter an abstractly existing mind but is produced by a moving body. Perception is already an incipient response, done by a body that must be postured along the lines of what is perceived in order to perceive it.

Several fundamental tenets of a coherent social psychological theory have now been drawn out of this analysis of the offense that animates Genesis. The story locates the process of self-consciousness as the feature distinguishing human identity; it depicts self-interaction as emerging with social interaction, positing a social basis for self regard; and it understands that the lived mechanics of self-awareness exist not in some moment when the individual is isolated from external influences (and has “time to reflect”) but ubiquitously, in and through his or her practiced perception of the environment.

It is, however, in its understanding of the contingencies and the challenge of shame that the Genesis story makes its greatest contribution to contemporary social psychology. God had warned that eating the fruit would bring death. The snake told Eve not to worry, promising that upon eating, her eyes would be opened and she would be as God. Yet what happens is something else again, something with no foreboding in the narrative. Eve and Adam find themselves seized by shame directed at their naked genitlals, an emotion that they manifest by the actions they take to cover themselves.

At least two steps must be explained in this surprising narrative development: the relation of shame to the genitals and the relation of shame to self-knowledge. The first point is in effect made etymologically by languages such as German whose words for shame reflect on the pubic region, and it is made philogenetically in the common childhood fear of being suddenly seen in public naked. Once again it is important to appreciate that sexual and non-sexual dimensions are artfully mixed in Genesis, and that the sexual reading is not primary.

**Shame and the genitals**

As Roger Scruton has recently emphasized, the sexual organs are uniquely related to presexualized play with the ontology of subjectivity and objectivity. Other organs and parts of the body are typically experienced in the sense of objectivity or subjectivity; we take for granted that our circulation and respiration “is done,” regarding it as exceptional if and when someone “does” those “automatic” processes; and we take it for granted that we move our head and limbs at will, regarding it as strange if we experience them as moving independently of our command. But the sexual organs are experienced as both under our control and at times beyond our control, at once deployed by us and again as “doing” us. As the locus for bodily elimination, the pubic region is the first site for the corporeal metaphysical play that later on will become the stuff of sexual life. Hold . . . and let go, hold . . . and let go: the sexual organs are intimately related to a primordial and infinitely creative, self-provocative play of “doing” and “being done by” life.

The nakedness that Adam and Eve perceive has multiple continuities with the meanings of the genital areas they attempt to cover. The two regretful thieves put on a form of clothing, achieving an original act of culture creation that is implosive with dialectical irony. It is in obscuring their organs of creativity that they first collectively create culture. And their culpability is revealed by their act of cover-up.

Clothing separates the individual from society, blocking the penetrating gaze of others, specifically by placing the individual in a collective fabric: “As the self is dressed, it is simultaneously addressed.” The irony, known by all those who pass from beach wear to street wear, is that clothing does not simply “hide” or “protect private parts,” it constructs a sensibility of being observed and so reveals a shameful privacy, privacy being dialectically constituted as what others are kept from observing.

**As a blush is to shame**

But why should self-reflection produce shame? The glance at self created by their eating is penetrating. The eating has stripped away their innocence, and not simply in a moral sense. No longer can they exist in paradise; now they will be haunted by the danger that any clothing, any definition of self they devise and present to others, will be an inadequate covering. Thus, their fig-leaf girdles in place, they are not restored to a sense of peace, for even with their new clothing, they sense that they must hide. The new definition of self is sensed by them as carrying new risks because of its transparency.
The theme relating clothing and shame captures the dualistic and dialectic nature of personal identity. If Adam and Eve had simply acquired a dialectic sense of their own identities, that is, a sense in which each would know himself or herself from the standpoint of the other, the girdle might be relied upon as a covering. Knowing what the other could see, each could rely on clothing to control the other’s perceptions, and each could by these means try to regain the innocent trust that was paradise. But there is a double nature – surface and subterranean – to their new self-reflective capacity. Now each knows not only how he or she may appear to the other, each knows that the other is aware of the process of constructing an identity to present to others. Now that they are self-aware in this three-dimensional sense, they cannot escape what they could not fully appreciate before, the forest-penetrating omniscience of their great Significant Other.

What is stripped away by the eating is in an objective sense nothing at all; after all, they had no clothes before that could be stripped away. What they lose is innocence: the recognition they require is of an inexorable nakedness that reveals itself in efforts to cover up. It is the endlessly penetrating power of the self-regard they have acquired that makes their act a Fall. The dialectical character of human identity is here represented by a momentary act of reaching up that is at once an eternal descent. For Adam and Eve, the knowledge of good and evil becomes a spiralling self-questioning: how could I have transgressed? Why did I heed the serpent? What is my nature, such that I could do such a thing, and having done it, immediately regret it?

We now may appreciate the full gravamen of the offense committed by Adam and Eve, the full meaning of the prohibited being they have become. In countless other myths, a mortal who transgresses a sacred interdict might offer sacrifices to the gods or might flee. Adam and Eve do neither. Their feeble effort to run away and their fig-leaf clothing are not sacrificial acts. The fig-leaf girdle in no way propitiates God’s anger, but it separates Adam and Eve from the animals, showing us that they now feel driven to go beyond the animals by dressing their creativity with culture. Their hiding is pathetically inadequate because they are condemned to cover their naked being not only in impersonal symbols, but also with the haunting appreciation that, as a blush is to shame, their disguise is itself a new form of revelation in the eyes of any penetrating observer.

The other tree in the garden, the tree of immortality, is essential to complete the anthropological function of the story. After the Fall, God forbids the couple to eat from that tree, and he banishes them from Eden, not at all out of anger, as we will see, but to avoid the possibility that they will complete their transition from animal to god. And at the east of Eden, God sets up “the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way to the tree of life.” In the end, man is neatly and permanently suspended between animal and god, possessing transcendent self-knowledge in a mortally frail body.

Genesis is not simply a myth that explains humanity’s uniquely intermediate cosmological place. It is also an experiment in theoretical imagination that produces a highly compressed social psychology. Social interaction is appreciated as a dualistic dialectical process in which one takes the standpoint of others to gauge how one will be seen by others, knowing that they are engaged in the very same process and thus may at any moment see more than one wants to reveal. Shame is located as an intrinsic, driving force behind the presentation of self to others. Shame is an inexorable force that is inspired by the double awareness that (1) without a cultural covering, one is like the animals and as such one is disgraced and (2) any presented self hints at the process of its presentation, setting one up for a second type of Fall.

In defense of Adam and Eve

Having specified the complaint, we may pass to the defense. In most respects, the case against Adam and Eve is clear and irrefutable. The prohibition was formally precise and effectively promulgated. Eve demonstrated her prior knowledge of the interdict in her colloquy with the serpent. If she was seduced, still she was under no duress. She could point to no defect in the law nor to any justification for her violation of it, nor, for his part, could Adam. We would appear to have here a clear instance of unmitigated sin, no less blameworthy because it was an unprecedented, original sin.

This is true only if we ignore the issue of competency. If the events in Eden transformed the original couple, giving them the knowledge of good and evil, how could they have been culpable before their metamorphosis into mature social beings? Certainly children, before a certain age, cannot be held as responsible as adults.23
Consider the facts of the case: If Eve acquired moral competence through the forbidden act, how could she have doubted the snake when he counselled (correctly it turned out!) that they would not die, and that they would become as God in their knowledge? The serpent, moreover, was also a creature of God, a fact that substantially complicates the moral analysis. Before eating, Eve lacked the capacity to hear cynicism or devious relish in the serpent’s voice. She could only hear in the snake’s voice the echoes from the resonantly repeated phrase applied to all God’s creations in Genesis 1: “it was good.” In a sense, Eve was reasonable in believing that God had authorized all his creatures to speak as his agents, such that the serpent’s entreaties warranted her revision of her understanding of the edict. Likewise Adam could not but respond in innocent conformity to Eve’s edible offer.

Now the moral thrust of the tale seems perversely turned around: if there is deviousness in the story, it is on the side of the Creator. God has put Adam and Eve in paradise without the capacity to understand good and evil, and he has put there a forbidden tree and a serpent that he has made exceptionally subtle. Would it not have been sacrilegious for Eve, and even more for Adam, not to have responded innocently to the inducements made to them by God’s creatures? Would it not have been hubris for Eve to have cynically doubted the snake and for Adam to have doubted God’s living gift to him, Eve?

Further, even assuming that Eve knew she was violating an interdict, her purpose was unqualifiedly pure: to become closer in nature to God. Her response to the serpent revealed no premeditation to break the law; instead she repeats the prohibition even more emphatically than it had been announced: God had prohibited eating, and Eve, showing her respectful sense of dread, adds a prohibition against even touching the tree. Against the confusing provocations of the “subtle” serpent, Eve is trying desperately to encase herself within the divine framework.

This line of reasoning is offered to highlight the artificiality of readings that would bring in modern notions of morality. If we start down the road of imputing blame – by holding Eve at fault, by seeing the snake as symbolizing phallic or sexual temptations that must be resisted, or by seeing fault in the actions of the original couple that we take as responsible for later sufferings of humankind – how can we stop short of imputing blame to the Creator of the system that led inexorably to the Fall? If we are invited to hold Eve or Adam at fault, we are justified in rebounding with the counter-charge: “it was a setup!”

An alternative reading, one that avoids moralistic interpretations, accepts that Eve and Adam could not but have violated the prohibition. Before eating, Adam and Eve shared the fundamental innocence of moral incapacity with the other animals. But even without knowing good and evil, animals sense boundaries and manifest patterns of avoidance that imply dread at transgression. As Ricoeur has written, primitive understandings of evil (primitive in a phenomenological and not just historical sense) revolve around notions of dread, awe, transgression of sacred interdicts, and retribution for acts that may be performed by man or animal, transgressions for which the actor’s intent is irrelevant. The hyena who defecates too near the tent has no defense against divine retribution, nor the woman who has sexual intercourse during a phase of impurity, nor the man who accidentally consumes forbidden foods. The moral boundaries constructed by such prohibitions may be coherently understood, not as means to test moral character, but as symbolic structures instituted to avoid chaos by creating intolerant segregations.

The hermeneutic world of Genesis takes for granted that nonreflective acts of sacred trespass are transgressions, whether done by animal or by man. Thus if Adam and Eve are punished for their transgression, so is the snake, who pointed the way to but never did acquire knowledge of good and evil. The serpent is cursed; and, for Adam and Eve, hostilities are institutionalized in relations between the sexes, among the generations, and between humankind and nature.

Most significantly for the anthropological issue at hand, the humans are banished from Eden before they can eat of the tree of (immortal) life. God does not seek to teach the first couple a set of commandments or to impress upon the audience a lesson that would guide their future conduct; there is, after all, no possibility that anyone could commit the same transgression, since no one will ever again have the state of original innocence that Adam and Eve shared. The upshot of the events in Eden is not moral philosophy but an exile that secures the order of the universe against further threats. There is no “moral” to the story, no direction as to what we should do to avoid corruption and misery; the story is, instead, a way of understanding existence as we confront it.

For our purposes, this point is crucial, for it means that the test of the validity of the Genesis myth is appropriately empirical. The empirical claim is that analogous tensions and dialectics can be found in the construction of any social act. Genesis “works” as a social psychology to
the extent that it is an economic description of the challenges that people face in their relations with others, with the natural world, and with forces they experience as sacred.

But other features of the narrative still nag us. If Eve is not held to be especially at fault for seducing Adam to transgress, why does she eat first? And if God has in effect set up the original couple for the Fall, like a great trickster in a native American myth system, how could that make sense in this sacred history?

Against the idea that the story somehow lodges a special blame against woman for the travails of all human beings, note that the story carefully fixes Eve’s acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil so that it coincides with Adam’s transformation. It is not as if Eve, having eaten the fruit, became devious and sought specifically to bring Adam into her state of disgrace. They both take on moral self-consciousness at the same instant. Eve’s prohibited act, taken in isolation from Adam and in relationship only with the natural world, is not enough to give birth even to her own human self. That decisive step of transformation must be taken jointly. Just as Adam existed in a loneliness that was impossibly insufferable before Eve was created, so Eve, after her transgression, exists in an impossible state of ontological ambiguity until Adam eats and instantly transforms the nature of both.

Their transformation occurs about midway in the intellectual structure of Genesis 1 through 3, which is an elaborated dialectic of metamorphosis. Before the creation of Adam, there is a free-spirited multiplication of the forms of life. There is no tension among the life forms nor between them and God. God is clearly in control; this is His story. After Adam and Eve leave Eden, the biblical narrative becomes history: man’s relations to man, with occasional interventions of divine action that respond to human needs and conflicts, form the backbone of the Hebrew bible. Social forms change after Eden and much more is revealed by sacred history, but there is no fundamental change in human nature.

As a textual device, Genesis 1–3 must effect a very rapid transition between History and history by introducing the entire moral, emotional, and existential dynamics that distinguish human life. This narrative challenge is accomplished by compressing into some seventy-five lines an engaging series of transforming tensions that constitute, when set out in analytic array, a stunningly compact series of dialectical nuances.

To begin, note that, before Adam, life forms (including human beings as created in 1:26, 27) do not emerge out of prior materials, beings, or life forms: they spring from the disembodied mind of God, out of his images, frequently on the self-executing command, “Let there be...” But Adam is formed, not from thought or image, but as a transformation of the dust of the ground. If humans will be different from all other beings by possessing a consciousness that allows them to set themselves off from the others, they are also of the world in a corporeal way that animals, which exist in a more thoroughgoing isolation from each other, lack. Humans are both less and more of the world than are non-human beings.

Immediately after Adam is created as the materialization of God’s breath in the dust of the ground, the next detail we learn of Adam’s life—the deliverance to him of the prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil—cuts back against the consistently positive direction of the previous narrative.

God himself then senses a lack, an absence that must be filled, and moves to create a “help mate” or companion for Adam. Adam has an unfettered power to name all the animals that God brings before him, but the story reveals the need for tension in order to make further progress. By being unqualifiedly subject to his will, the animals cannot be satisfying companions for Adam; because they cannot oppose him, they cannot come sufficiently close to him to overcome his loneliness. Human existence is already essentially dialectical.

Eve then is brought out of Adam to be joined with him. Eve is the material externalization of Adam’s shadow nature, his sense of I-am-what-I-am-not. If Yahweh is “I-am-that-I-am” (as he explains to Moses in the episode of the burning bush), Adam is a dialectical complement to God’s nature, a being condemned to take its identity from others, to find its own identity by merging with other beings. Sex completes the dialectical phase of the creation of Eve, as a positive not a negative narrative move. Adam, having split himself in two with the emergence of Eve, immediately transcends this impossible disjuncture and becomes as “one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.”

After Eve eats and introduces Adam to the forbidden fruit, Adam becomes the catalyst for the materialization of a potential that is latent in Eve’s being. She has eaten but has not become conscious of good
and evil, and she cannot until Adam eats. Just as Eve was present as an absence sensed by a lonely Adam before her creation, so Adam’s metamorphosis completes an incipient transformation of Eve’s nature.

Once they both have eaten, they become aware of the dialectical process that has shaped their evolution. Having eaten, they immediately turn and find themselves lacking. Locating an intolerable absence in their identities, they fashion a covering, but they immediately appreciate that this covering, the girdle of fig leaves, is inadequate. They seek even further covering behind the trees of the garden.

The fig-leaf girdle is a second introduction of culture into the world. The first introduction was Adam’s classification of the animals, but the animals could be neither more nor less than what Adm names them. For Adam and Eve, however, their clothing is self-reflexive and cannot contain them. Their understanding now leaps beyond any definition of themselves that they create for others to see. If they can at times be of “one flesh” with each other, they cannot routinely merge with the roles they shape for themselves in society. They skulk in shame behind the appearances they have fashioned, and then they shiver in fear behind the trees that they use as a second covering.

In defense of Adam and Eve, we have seen that imputations of fault are largely beside the point. The strategy of the text is to develop a series of dialectical themes as the ground for the emergence of the dialectic of self. Personal identity emerges as the culmination in human psyche of a series of existential tensions.

Thus, before Adam and Eve experience the original flash of self-awareness, they have been shaped by creative oppositions: (a) **between spirit and matter** – God’s breath combines with dust to make Adam; (b) **between sexualized gender complements** – Eve complements Adam, first by emerging as separate from him and then by becoming one flesh with him, while Adam is mother to Eve, who is taken from the cavity of his body and becomes the mother of all humankind; (c) **between paradise and evil** – a tempting but dangerous tree morally anchors the garden’s pleasures; (d) **and between God and man** – as Eve emerged from within Adam’s body, so Adam previously emerged from a recess even more deeply hidden within God’s body, as His breath, as the ambivalent realization of God’s own sense of something absent from His creation that He needed to create in order to complete His work and that, once created, had an oppositional potential, and hence had to be warned not to eat from the forbidden tree. Behind Adam’s loneliness and need for Eve is the loneliness of this historically unique, singular, and isolated god. Adam is created in effect to become God’s help-mate, creating culture to typify the animals through giving them names, much as God had been responsible earlier for creating each creature “after its kind.”

Once Adam and Eve had crystallized the prior dialectics by acquiring their distinctively reflexive identities, they could then become the medium for generating the further tensions that would shape history. Woman’s creativity is opposed by the phallic dangers of the serpent and by the pains of childbirth; her freedom is subordinated to man’s power. Adam finds that nature has been set in opposition to him, such that his survival will require his creative struggle, working the ground through “the sweat of thy face.” Man, having metamorphosed out of the unresolved tensions that God had created, now must confront them, as God Himself did not. The tensions themselves have likewise metamorphosed, having become express divine moral order rather than latent in the structure of life. And the drama now changes from cosmological to historical.

**The sentencing of Adam and Eve**

Perhaps the most obscure part of the case against Adam and Eve is their punishment. Most commonly, the punishment is construed as a vengeful God banishing Eve and Adam to endure gender-distinctive sufferings. But God calculates that the human pair must be driven out of Eden, not simply for what they have done but for what they might do: eat from the tree of eternal life. Not angry retribution but the coolly practical goal of specific deterrence requires their banishment, the assignment of a cherubim-guard, and the installation of an eternally turning, flaying sword.

Certainly the primary spirit of the punishment is not simply wrath. In what seems clearly an act of kindness, “the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.” But God’s benevolence is ambivalent. A new, especially burdensome injunction is hidden in the gift.  

The other forms of punishment in the story are less revolutionary. Essentially they perfect changes that have already occurred. The serpent, previously distinguished from the other animals by his subtlety,
has his animal status clarified as he is put down to eat “dust.” The “enmity” that God declares between the serpent and Eve does not create but formalizes the relationship they had already formed. In his original act of treachery, the snake had already attacked Eve’s innocence, and Eve had already turned against the snake, explaining that she ate because the snake had “beguiled” her.

Eve’s subordination to Adam, in the pronouncement that her husband shall rule over her, similarly reinstitutionalizes a prior relationship, the dependence that characterized her birth. God announced that He will “multiply” Eve’s pain and travail, not invent new miseries. And indeed, before God’s specific intervention, both Adam and Eve had already known what it was like to work in fearful anxiety as they realized for the first time that they had to hustle to cover their naked existence by sewing garments.

It is almost as if God, in delivering punishment, was trying to catch up with a history that had begun to unfold independent of His specific interventions. He formalizes changes that have already taken place, manifestly taking control of events that appear to have moved far beyond His ability to control. This reading follows from an understanding of the narrative as a dialectic in which not only Adam and Eve but God also forms an image of Himself, humankind, that then poses a challenge to Himself.

The one genuinely creative, unprecedented element of the punishment is, ironically, God’s gift of animal skins. That this gift is part of the punishment is indicated in the first instance by its location in the text between the specification of burdens and the banishment from Eden. That positioning of benevolence invites us to reflect.

In one respect, the gift offsets and complements the burdens defined for Adam, burdens that are unlike those prescribed for Eve. Adam alone is told that he will have to work a resistant land. The tale here completes its construction of the tripartite oppositional nature of man: in isolation from God; in tension with the woman that he must dominate (or in tension with a dominating man); and in a hostile relationship to the natural world he must exploit. The clothes of animal skins replace the garment of fig leaves that Adam and Eve had devised from conveniently available materials. If their clothing must be of animal skins, they can foresee the necessity of killing animals, thus ending in this respect as well the peace that had been theirs in Eden.

The garment of animal skins is both an aesthetic product and a practically useful tool. Adam and Eve will have to protect themselves from the elements and from the thistles and thorns that attack them while they work nature into sustenance. The fig leaves were no more than a “girdle” or “apron,” a device to enclose and hide from shame. The animals skins stand for the identity they will have to create, a two-faced persona, fashioned in flesh, that at once guards one’s creative center from the penetrating gaze of others and that intervenes creatively in the world.

Yet the clothes of animal skins, while functioning as a tool, are not just tools, as gifts of hammers, saws, plows, and so forth, might have been; they are also means of personal expression. This gift is the culmination of a theme, built up in the story through several stages, of the aesthetic nature of human beings. Adam first takes the process of creation from God by generating the names for the animals God introduces to him. Then Adam and Eve jointly innovate their apron of fig leaves. Finally, Adam is once again depicted as a culture-creator in an aside that appears in the description of the divine punishment. After receiving the details of his burdens and before receiving the gift of animal skins, Adam gives his wife the name of Eve. The text makes clear that this is a symbolic name, explaining that it signifies the mother of all living.

When Adam first gave physical birth to Eve, she was known only as woman, or “taken out of man.” Woman can become Eve, a being who turns toward her genitals and can pull life out of her center, only after acquiring reflexivity through eating the forbidden fruit. Adam celebrates her new creativity by acting as a midwife in the poetic re-birth of woman.

In several ways, then, the story demonstrates that Adam will need a sensibility beyond that of the pragmatic tool user. He will have to be aggressive, fighting the land and animals, but he will also have to be artful, a creator of expressive symbols. His work will be not just the sweat of his brow but a craft.

In this regard, the fact that the animal skins come to Adam and Eve by the grace of God is crucial. In his struggles to survive, Adam will need inspiration. He is not enjoined to pray, to sacrifice, or otherwise to undertake some ritual practice at a sacred time and hallowed place that is formally separated from his labors. Adam receives a gift to facilitate his work, a divine gift that is tied to his labors. This gift is, on the
one hand, not simply symbolic, as might be an altarpiece or sacred
souvenir of the creation, but is, on the other hand, not simply a tool but
an inspiring symbol recalling divine beneficence.\textsuperscript{32}

The need for this gift of grace is not simply due to the new harsh envi-
ronment that has become humanity's fate. Strictly speaking, it was not
the divine cursing of the ground that required new garments for Adam
and Eve. Before the punishment, their fig-leaf girdles left them shiver-
ing in fear. It was the acquisition of a dualistic, dialectical personal
identity and the consequent Fall into bottomless self-reflection that
made the fig leaves inadequate. Aware now that God will see through
their disguise, Adam and Eve hide in the anxious awareness that they
cannot by their own means cover themselves effectively.

Here is a conception of culture that is at once pragmatic (in the sense of
utilitarian or tool-like) and transcendent (in the sense of inspiring,
when one's subjectivity is taken by forces that exist outside oneself).
Human beings must depend on grace to put their reflexivity at rest and
create the natural character of everyday human life. Whether at work
or in casual social interaction, they must shape their actions within
divine form; they must style their conduct as if it conformed naturally
to a guiding spirit.

At the end of the tale, God leaves Adam and Eve suspended in a
double sense. Horizontally, in terrestrial space, they are ejected from
Eden without a destination in mind. Vertically, they are left reaching
up, not in a prayerful search for further benevolence but in the neces-
sary attempt to undertake their labors with grace. The flight from Eden
is undertaken in a chaos that is a search both for a terrestrial home and
for renewed protection from the creator.\textsuperscript{33}

The animal-skin garment, as a gift of grace, is a powerfully enthral-
ing injunction to act in the spirit of grace during their daily labors. God
now moves off center stage, and, when mortals make competing claims
that their self-serving actions are divinely inspired, He will not delib-
erate among them. Thus the injunction creates a posture that may at
any moment be pretentious and must always risk hubris. In effect, with
this extraordinarily paradoxical gift, God condemns man eternally to
replay the original Fall. The fateful first reaching up now must be re-
peated daily and as a matter of bare survival, not for any special glory
but just to get by.

The myth thus accounts for a second, spiritual form of shame. The first
was a bodily form, occasioned by an act of eating and lived through a
self-conscious horror of publicly visible, naked genitals. At the ser-
pent's behest, Adam and Eve fell to the level of animal desire. The new
injunction, to act with a graceful aesthetic, is issued to protect God's
monopoly on divine being, and it subjects man to the shame of Icarus,
of attempting to be more than human.

The fully rounded social psychology of Genesis emerges in the impli-
cations of this dualistic appreciation of shame. Max Scheler specifically
and students of Nietzsche more diffusely have appreciated that shame
takes two forms in experience, what Scheler termed body shame and
spiritual shame.\textsuperscript{34} Body shame, a fearful sense of isolation at being
revealed as intolerably naked in the face of a presumably omniscient
community, is depicted in the original Fall. It is captured as well in
more prosaic, literal missteps and falls, the stuff of low comedy, in such
humiliating disasters as may occur upon the loss of sphincter control
and in the childhood nightmare of being caught in public with one's
genitals exposed. These and an infinite variety of other examples insti-
gate shame when the individual becomes aware that he or she is per-
ceived to be more animal than human, that he or she is perceived as
unable to maintain even the most elemental social role or to keep
clothed in even a superficially presentable identity, somehow incapable
of taking any respectable position in society.

Spiritual shame occurs when one recognizes that one appears to have
pretended without warrant to have a superior status. Spiritual shame
more routinely exists in anticipation in the form of a posture of modes-
ty, awe, or humility that guards against being unable to sustain an
appearance of superiority. Spiritual shame ripens in experiences that
reveal a gap, experiences such as realizing that others believe that one
has, by misusing a phrase, revealed profound gaps in one's implied
superior education, feeling disgrace when spectacular revelations of
fraud reveal that one lacks the moral character to take an elite position
in society, feeling that one has not individually earned the honorific
personal praise that one is receiving.

Contemporary social science has mined the forms of body shame in
search of the putative sources of a myriad of personal and social prob-
lems.\textsuperscript{35} Spiritual shame has been much less readily appreciated, and,
indeed, the implication of spiritual shame -- that it is not the presence
but the lack of shame in the shape of modesty or humility that is prob-
lematic – appears to be deeply uncomfortable for many contemporary theorists.

Erving Goffman’s early distinction, between the impressions a person gives and the impressions a person gives off, was an important observation of the double-tracked nature of social action. When in the face-to-face presence of others (and more subtly in more indirect forms of social interaction), individuals are concerned, not simply to act in socially recognizable forms (host/guest; speaker/listener; waiter/patron; male/female) but also to sustain an appearance that speaks as to whether they really are the kind of person implied by their actions. The individual is burdened with a double challenge: to maintain a self-conscious awareness that his or her actions remain reasonably within the projected identity and to dissolve self-consciousness in an aesthetic that conveys that the line of action projected is naturally embedded in one’s being.

An appreciation of the aspects of conduct that guard against spiritual shame has required particularly demanding forms of empirical analysis. Ethnomethodological researchers began the examination of the routine practices by which people shape all their conduct so that others will bypass notice of the formative process itself and take conduct as naturally occurring and obviously coherent. An important early essay by Harvey Sacks described how conduct of whatever substantive sort is produced so that it is taken without reflection to be “ordinary” conduct. Sacks marked the elaborate and diverse work entailed in sustaining a sense among inter-actors that they are engaged similarly and effortlessly in some ordinary sort of activity and situation (including “wow!” situations).

In effect, this line of research develops an empirical parallel for the account in Genesis of a religious foundation of everyday social life, the empirical analysis being directed toward members’ maintenance of a shared, taken-for-granted, and unspoken faith that the mechanics for producing social action will not be examined as they occur. Harold Garfinkel, in a series of innovative “breaching experiments,” revealed the carefully practiced disattentions by which people sustain a taken-for-granted trust that everyone similarly understands what is transpiring. Current work in a variety of fields demonstrates how a faith that collective understanding flows naturally is conveyed tacitly, through style or manner, and through gestures that are at once seen and responded to, but not made the matter of notice. The up-shot of a generation of such work is the point that, in order to sustain interaction, the practical tasks of producing interrelated sound and body movements must be carried by a graceful vehicle, by an aesthetic that is only tacitly witnessed.

At about the same time that sociologists were developing research traditions to study the tacit practices that sustain faith in interaction, the scientist/philosopher Michael Polanyi was developing his statement of tacit knowledge. With brief, effective examples, Polanyi revealed the tacit embodiment that is necessary for social acts that range from the most mundane to the most esoteric. Take writing with a pen. If one focuses on the practices by which one creates the shape of individual letters, one loses the train of thought that makes possible the writing of coherent messages. Writing must be a drawing that flows. Similarly, talking is not done by calling up letters, syllables, or even words, but as a tacit singing, which, again, is seen or sensed but must remain unnoticed if talk is to maintain a substantive focus. Walking is not a matter of putting step before or after step, but a kind of prosaic dancing, and so on.

The tacit dimension is both essential to practical action and aesthetic in nature; culture, in a more or less graceful form, is not simply surplusage or commentary on people’s behavior, it is the fundamental vehicle for all competent conduct. One must be taken by the flow of the pen, the flow of one’s utterances, or the flow of one’s steps to write, talk, or walk with practical competence. In being taken by trajectories that overarch any formally divisible acts (letters written, words uttered, steps laid down), one relies, in an eminently “grounded” empirical sense, on transcendental forms and spirits. One must be “taken” in order to act competently. Too much self-consciousness freezes interational competence; a recipient of talk who watches the speaker’s hands or mouth too intently will, if perceived by the speaker, occasion a reprisal of the Fall of Adam and Eve, creating a chaos that momentarily incapacitates the speaker.

The two forms of shame indicated in Genesis have empirical referents in commonly experienced, socially situated emotions. Just as Scheler distinguished body shame from spiritual shame, so we will profit by examining a parallel distinction in the socially situated experience and conduct of anger, laughter, and crying. The child’s crying is an experience of isolation, of loss of community, reminiscent of Adam and Eve’s Fall. But the child does not know of a second form of crying, one that
becomes possible only at a later, more complex level of personal development: the tears of joy or the respectful tears produced in moments of inspiring awe.

With anger it will be useful to distinguish between hot rage, which results directly from a humiliating sense of being wrongfully attacked as incompetent, and a cold anger that imposes destruction on others out of a spirit of transcendent meanness. And in analyzing laughter, we can recall Bergson and examine some instances of humor as a response to depictions of people as mechanical, animal, or otherwise less than human, but we will need to appreciate inspiration in order to understand the more elevated versions of humor that give force to wit.

Adam and Eve’s Fall is a protean image for understanding everyday, socially situated emotional behavior. There are falls that are embarrassing, falls that lead to tears, falls that are occasions for slapstick humor, and falls that require counterattack because they result from being pushed. And conversely there are emotional postures that risk by reaching up: an anger that presumes a right to dominate others with a will that surpasses their capacities of understanding; a modesty that holds onto shame as essential to maintain respect for the grand and the sacred; a crying that acknowledges what is overwhelmingly beautiful and untouchably precious; and a laughter that takes off from the surprise of achieving collective humorous understandings.

Running across the differences among these emotions is the peculiar dialectic that distinguishes emotional experience. Emotions are most personal to the individual; they are “subjective” phenomena, what is undeniably “me” and “mine,” forms of bodily expression that are irreducibly idiosyncratic. At the same time, emotions are experienced as forces that emerge and subside beyond the individual’s control, as dynamics that transcend the individual’s being, as senses of what is attractive or repulsive that emerge whether or not those feelings accord with one’s more reflectively preferred values and perspectives.

While close examination of social interaction will show that people meticulously “do” their emotions, for example by regulating their laughter in tight synchrony and by modulating crying in detailed response to their awareness of the perception of themselves by others, research can also disclose the degree to which people feel “done by” emotional dynamics. The emotional dialectic of “doing” emotionally expressive behavior and “being done” by emotional forces is captured fully in the original Fall. Thus, on the one hand, Adam and Eve recognize that they have brought shame onto themselves: and on the other, they are left anxiously anticipating the horrors that may befall them should they lose the mantle of God’s grace.

Exiled from Eden, Adam and Eve find themselves condemned to a freedom to move between the risks of body shame and spiritual shame. They are obliged now to wear the clothing of some conventional role and maintain the covering of a socially recognizable identity in order to avoid the shame of being less than human. At the same time, they must risk pretentiousness by conducting themselves as if the identity they construct is somehow not solely their construction but is guided by a natural style, by some form of grace. The tale of Genesis in Eden is thus a comprehensive portrait of the ongoing challenge of the person in society.

The narrative opinion

Having considered the complaint, the defense, and the punishment, I examine what might be termed the opinion of the case, meaning here the story form in which the facts and moral response are laid out. The hermeneutical necessity and the resonance of the story both hinge on its finishing touch to human ontology. If the couple attains moral awareness by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they fail to obtain critical empirical powers when they are blocked from eating from the tree of life. Unable to acquire immortality, they are condemned to pursue a spiritual life through profoundly limited bodily means. Now self-conscious, they have become ineluctably aware of the consequences of their actions, but, because they must act through mundane bodies, they are inherently unable to grasp directly the causes of their conduct.

The use of the myth as an interpretive form is an upshot of the uniquely human suspension of being between undesirable awareness and incurable ignorance. Looking forward, Adam and Eve leave Eden with a triple injunction to strive for transcendence: 1. They now understand that, independent of any reasoned commitment to moral reflection, their landscape will present seductive temptations and moral challenges. 2. Each knows he/she can only become complete by uniting with the other. 3. They share the responsibilities of bearing the gift of grace.
Looking backward, however, to the origins of their conduct, they are triply blinded by their corporeality. First, temporally considered, each social act will be performed by a body that took on fundamental dimensions of character – gender, ethnicity, color of personality, etc. – in childhood, before the full powers of self-awareness emerged.\(^{44}\)

Second, spatially considered, any strip of human action always works off of background regions of the body that must be drawn on as relatively unattended resources. For examples, the gestures that accompany language routinely precede the utterances to which they are linked;\(^{45}\) they are commonly employed as collaboratively seen-but-unnoticed maquettes for the speech they guide into socially focused expression.\(^{46}\) Finally, as a medium for action, the flesh alternates between probing subject and feeling object, taking the shape of what is seen in order to see it, resonating with the other's voice in order to hear it, lending itself as a vehicle that articulates what the other would say if able, intertwining self and other in multiplex, subtle ways that slip away from reflections that would perceive "self" from the standpoint of an "other" or from "outside."\(^{47}\)

How can we grasp the rustlings and mumblings, the crude initiations and rough machinations that lead to conventionalized expressions, without gazing at the origins of social action so directly that we freeze our subjects in an incapacitating shame? We must seek origins in their own terms, phases, and forms, which means, to use Giorgio Agamben's felicitous phrase, in their "in-fancy."\(^{48}\) Condemned to a transcendent project whose constituent acts must draw on mundane, corporeal resources, resources that in turn must transcend their awareness, people turn to fables. In these enchanted stories, animals, usually dumb embodiments of life, speak articulately, and people, otherwise distinguished by language, fall entranced into silence in order to listen for hints to the mysteries of their origins.

Now we can appreciate why the narrative in Genesis 1–3 is so richly applicable to the empirical dynamics of emotional life. The reason that the story works so well is that something very much like it is told by everyone. The telling occurs quietly and almost inaudibly, in the implosively rich doings of routine emotional experience. To imagine that we are imposing a social psychology of everyday life onto the biblical text is to turn the relationship on its head!

Like the story line of Adam and Eve, emotions are most fundamentally patterns of metamorphosis. The very body of our experience is transformed when we laugh, cry, become ashamed, or get angry. These emotional processes are literally livings of metaphors. When we say, in order to convey what we feel in moments of shame, that we wish to sink down and have the earth cover us up,\(^{49}\) we describe as best we can just what we actually experience: a desperate attempt by spirit to flee the body, a wish to disappear but not quite die. Because the experience is not verbal, any effort to express it in language will require yet another metamorphosis and will be at best an approximation. But the experience is literally one of a change in the bodily form or lived metaphor of being.

Similarly, when we say that we "break up" in laughter, we roughly describe what we will find in a close examination of people laughing: a manifestation of an unsettled footing for conduct, the doing of a juxtaposition in and through a body that, in attempting to be at two places, demonstrates one's grasp of two otherwise inconsistent senses. Research that would simply stamp or code behavior as "laughing" or "not laughing" would gloss over the very stuff of laughter, which is a naturally known but still always extraordinary process of banging self against self in visual or audible dimensions.

Similarly we can understand crying, when it occurs from a sense of loss, as a face that tries to transcend a destroyed self by representing its dissolution in tears. Such a description is not an attempt to wax poetic and escape the rigors of empirical examination. It is the result of a search for a vocabulary that will remain close to the phenomenon that we are trying to explain.

The narrative structure of Genesis outlines a metamorphosis that is applicable to everyday, socially situated emotional experience and that has been systematically ignored in social science.\(^{50}\) As a text, the story of Adam and Eve has a timeless prologue and a quickly occurring, tripartite dramatic structure of fall/metamorphosis/narrative reconstruction. In their first act, Adam and Eve displace God as the protagonist at the center stage of religious history by falling out of a peaceful immersion in a paradisiacal background. In the immediately ensuing second phase, the original couple departs in nature from the animals and becomes human together, through an interdependent experience of shame, a dialectical awareness of themselves as both outside of and inextricably dependent on communion. Adam and Eve's shame marks
an ontological metamorphosis; their awakening from moral innocence and their re-birth as humans is a sensual transformation. The drama closes with the couple facing tragedy and condemned to search chaotically for the grace that will make possible a renewed communal embrace, which now must be found in the mortal history of family units, tribal relations, and nation-building.

Diverse forms of emotional experience may be understood as developing along these narrative lines. Experiences that we conventionally term “emotional” are not always narratively formed because they are not always shaped to articulate precisely with immediate social situations. We have moods, dispositions, and passions that may mount and decline in little, if any, close relationship with situations in which we are face-to-face and doing something with others. For understanding such forms of emotional experience, the process of fall/metamorphosis/narrative reconstruction may have marginal utility. But when shame or anger, laughter, and crying, and also sexual activity are conducted in immediate interaction with others, we will find them to be marked by these three dramatic stages.

The central demand of socially situated conduct is that one make collaborative sense of who one is and what one is doing, that one present himself or herself as being some cognizable kind of person engaged in some form of recognizable conduct. We are condemned to make sense of ourselves whenever we perceive that others perceive us, not because we are “other directed” or inclined toward conformity but because we cannot shut off our own self-awareness. Once a person senses that he or she has entered another’s sacred or vividly monitored space, it will be impossible not to take account of how one’s actions are likely to shape how the other will see oneself. One may pretend not to perceive the other, one may manifest indifference to the other’s existence, one may choose to go “away” mentally and lose awareness of the other; but so long as a person knows he or she is being known by another, it will be impossible not to be involved in shaping the other’s image of who one is and what one is doing.

People in social situations are fundamentally preoccupied with a task that has a narrative dimension in the sense of the identity they are constructing for themselves. When it is socially situated, emotional behavior is unique in its dialectical form in that the actors are engaged in socially recognizable doings, or actions carefully shaped with regard to their coherent appearance to others (laughing, crying, blushing, getting angry with someone), that simultaneously manifest the experience of being done by forces beyond one’s control. In social situations, laughter, anger, crying, and shame are performed with meticulous attention to perceptible detail even as they convey that the spirits that have been raised have taken the person beyond his or her autonomous control.

In order to make sense of having lost the ability autonomously to make sense of one’s being and behavior, the person faces a distinctively challenging narrative task. Employed in a tacit dimension, the embodiment of action in metaphor or aesthetic processes is essential to all mundane action. But in emotional conduct, the body manifestly breaks up (in laughter), breaks down (in tears), breaks out (in anger), or freezes (in shame); in one of these ways the body takes center stage, at least for the emotionally moved person, and no matter how common the performance may be, he or she expresses being exceptionally taken by forces that undermine the routinely invisible embodiment of conduct. Having turned to dramatize a self-reflection on the bodily sources of conduct, the person faces special narrative challenges in order to transcend the Fall and return to a tacitly embodied involvement in routine action.

Conclusion

I am arguing for three links between the biblical creation myth and social theory. First, I am arguing that, by exploiting the story for the social psychological ideas that can be drawn out of it, we have a rich way to appreciate the nuances of the myth. By treating “Adam and Eve” as a paragon of the memorable and social embodiment of sociology, we can effectively appreciate the elaborate, highly tuned, richly coherent, and subtle structure of the myth. We can answer a series of initially enigmatic questions about the logic of the story, and in the process we can bring out some of its neglected features, such as the burden in the final gift. Here empirical theory serves to clarify the hermeneutics of a powerfully appealing element of cultural life.

Next, reversing the perspective, we can reveal the myth as a testable empirical theory. In this article, I can only suggest the promise of such a theory. But this operation draws out theoretical ideas about emotions—such as their dualistic and dialectical character—that are difficult to summarize elegantly without the aid of the symbolic powers of mythical narrative and that point empirical investigation in new directions.
Third, there is the empirical question of the impressive resonance of the story of Adam and Eve. I am arguing that the everyday emergence and decline of emotions, in typically brief, typically inconsequential, social interactional episodes, parallels the metamorphosis described in Genesis. This parallel indicates a ground for the appeal of the creation myth wherever people structure their emotions into socially situated forms, wherever "falls," literal or figurative, can lead alternatively to shame, laughter, crying, or anger. The narrative structure of everyday emotions is surely not the only nor the most important basis of the appeal of Adam and Eve, but there is a grounding for the resonance of the story, a tacit basis for its pervasive appeal, in the stories that we corporeally convey as we construct socially situated episodes of shame, laughter, anger, and crying.

Something similar was argued by the English and German literary and philosophical Romantics but their claims were far more ambitious. They frequently appreciated biblical stories such as those of the Fall from paradise, the prodigal son, and the tearing of Christ from communal embrace and eventual resurrection, not as history or allegory but as proto-scientific summaries of ongoing human realities. In M. H. Abrams's review, the Romantic "tendency was . . . to naturalize the supernatural and to humanize the divine." All the figures and events of the Bible were "to be seen and felt within you." My position in this essay is neither so grand nor so optimistic. I am arguing that emotions in everyday social life describe a metamorphosis of fall, chaos, and an attempt at graceful reintegration, but not that this process describes all of social life, much less all of history, nor even that it describes what is most fundamental, best, or most elevating in life, as the Romantics might have said. For Schiller, the Fall was "fortunate" because it led to a spiral ascent toward a paradise more grand than the one Adam lost. Our situated emotions routinely lead back to the banalities from which they emerged. Moreover, much of emotional life does not necessarily take the form of bounded narrative episodes; indeed much of what may be most important about social life, in any number of senses, is not characterized by the bouts of crying and anger, phases of shameful feeling, and moments of laughter that this essay addresses. But the story of Eden resonates elaborately in emotionally colorful moments within the mundane prose of routine interaction, just as those sensually vivid experiences are narrated in corporeally distinctive ways. Revisiting Genesis, we can grasp its wisdom reverberating through the workings of emotions in everyday social life.

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Notes

1. Claus Westermann, however (Genesis: A Practical Commentary, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1987, 28), wrote that "the narrative of ‘Paradise and Fall’ . . . is based on traditions about the creation of the human race common to all of humanity. In contrast to this universal significance stands a limited, dogmatic interpretation, which finds here the basis for the doctrine of ‘original sin,’ caused by the ‘Fall,’ " such as that of St. Augustine.

2. In this respect, contemporary popular and social-scientific culture share a wooden conception of personal identity. Popular culture invents rock-steady types like James Bond to contemplate a man who makes love to an infinite variety of women. In the love making, Bond never changes; no woman fundamentally alters his nature. (After sex, Bond proves the point to himself by taking a shower with only hot and then only cold water). Zeus, surely no less powerful a hero figure than Bond, had to change into a new form—a swan, a shower of gold dust, a bull—each time he mated with a mortal woman. Which imagery is the more literal, which the more fantastic? Social science assumes a Bond-like identity for its actors, who take positions on various dimensions or give off qualitatively different expressions in interaction but who never change their essential form. This ontological assumption must be challenged if we are to grasp what is essential to emotional life in society. In the field of "science studies" and recently more generally, Bruno Latour, ("Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together," Social Problems 35 (June 1988): 298–310; We Have Never Been Modern, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1993), has begun a broad-gauged challenge to this assumption.


6. For this reason, translations and interpretations that would create a new legacy are ignored. A prominent example is Harold Bloom and David Rosenberg, The Book of J (New York: Vintage, 1990).

7. Biblical scholarship has appreciated the contradictions between the different narrative traditions that were combined in the text as a reflection of the political and social realities that produced the stories. In a contemporary setting, we are aware that a community may most fundamentally exist along "axes of variation" between contradictory cultural themes was put to detailed use by Kai Eriksson in Everything in Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1976).
10. "From Old Testament usage ... the pair of terms (good and evil) is not at all used only in the moral sense, not even especially in the moral sense. Knowledge of good and evil means, therefore, omniscience in the widest sense of the word." Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, rev edition (London: SCM Press LTD, 1972), 81. This interpretation is consistent with recent arguments, based on linguistic analyses of Hebrew, that the "good and evil" in the description of the tree are not narrowly moral concepts but more broadly, knowledge of all that is desirable and undesirable. Nothomb, *L'Homme Immortel*.
12. Compare this to Charles Mopsik, "The Body of Engenderment in the Hebrew Bible, the Rabbinic Tradition and the Kabbalah," in Michel Feher, editor, *Fragment for a History of the Human Body*, Part One. (New York: Zone [trans. Matthew Ward], 1989), 52: "The creation of man and man's begetting are two moments of a single movement ... here ... is a distinctive feature of the biblical text which has not been sufficiently emphasized by the exegetes: the first thing God said to Adam (that is, to the man and the woman) was not the prohibition against eating, ... Following very logically the mention of the likeness to God the Creator, the procreative power of man is evoked, ... Immediately after man is described as being created male and female in the likeness of God, he is told to be fruitful and multiply, to procreate. There is a direct connection between the image of God in which man was created and his capacity to engender other men."
13. Fox points to "the echoing of the word 'eat', whose connotation changes from sustenance/bounty (2:9, 16) to prohibition (2:17) to misunderstanding (3:1–5) and disobedience (3:6, 11–13), and finally to curse (3:14, 17, 19). Such a flexible use of words sets up a rhythmic drama which, as much of Genesis, bears resemblance to poetry rather than prose." Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 16.
14. Cf. Nothomb, *L'Homme Immortel*, 94: "Le serpent n'est pas un porte-parole de la tentation morale ou de l'instinct sexuel, comme on ne cesse de nous le servir. Il est la voix intérieure, ou plutôt une des voix intérieures de l'âme humaine du passé révolu de la pensée réfléchissante, aux prises avec elle-même, qui, se heurtant aux limites qu'assigne à ses concepts la réalité, a tendance à vouloir les franchir dans le pseudo-réalité du langage par un mouvement de va-et-vient, thèse, antithèse, synthèse, qu'on appelle la dialectique."
18. Many have found the serpent's identity to be specifically ambiguous, or even feminine. "Christian artists ... manage to give the monster a somewhat hermaphrodite appearance while still indicating some kind of identification between the Serpent and Eve herself." Edmunch Leach, *Genesis as Myth and other Essays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), 15, making reference to works by Van der Goes and Miche-langelo. For an illustration from a late 13th-century Jewish illuminated manuscript, that shows the serpent with a child-like, sexually ambiguous but clean-skinned face that contrasts with a bearded Adam, see the cover of Susan Niditch, *Chaos and Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985).
20. The use of the figure of a girde woven from fig leaves to express the event of becoming existentially intertwined in the world is poetically both exquisite and so uncompromising that it has been ignored by centuries of commentary. To weave such a garment, the stems would have to be intertwined. Sensually, such a garment would blur the separation of human being and environment, both penetrating the wearers and sticking them to the inanimate world. In the world from which the story emerged, the audience was doubtlessly aware that when picked, the stems of fig leaves exude a sticky substance, milky or semen-like in appearance, that stains human skin slightly, and that is used effectively in folk cultures to reduce moles and other unseemly protuberances of the skin. The image of an oozing fabric of fig leaves covering shrinking genitals would inspire a visceral reaction on the part of an audience that lives close to and routinely exploits these natural properties. An understanding that people do not exist as "subjects" (or against "objects," with an "inner" life opposed to what can be seen of them from "outside," but are at once naturally self-reflective and intertwined with the world, was the unique philosophical/social psychological life's work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. He makes his argument most elegantly and powerfully, although rather densely, in the posthumous "The Intertwining-the Chiasm," in his *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130–155.
23. Bloom, *The Book of J*, 184, disputes a reading of "sin" or "crime," finding instead the spirit of "children's literature" in the hiding, the laying off of blame, and the fear that Adam and Eve share "When the parent's footsteps are heard...." The story has often been understood as summarizing the metamorphosis of child into adult.
24. "...the tempter is right up to a point. The man eats from the forbidden fruit and does not die!" Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, 23. For an interpretation of a spiritual sense in which the eating did bring death, see Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Temptation*, 70.
28. This is also of the first mention of God's creation of man, in Genesis 1:27, where "God created man in his own image ... male and female," enjoining them to "be fruitful, and multiply, ..." Whatever the explanation for the double-telling of the creation of human beings in Genesis, for our purposes the point is that before people could have names (i.e., human culture and personality) and then set off to create history, a variety of tensions and further ontological transformations were required.
29. On the centrality of this dialectic in narrative and experience, see Paul Ricoeur, *Onself as Another* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

30. Fox, *The Five Books of Moses*, 273, following Buber and Rosenzweig, translates Eliezer Asher Eliezer as "I will be there however I will be there." In either case, the repetition within the phrase retains motifs of enigmatic tautology and inaccessible self-containment about the identity of this God who mates with no one. Anticipating that the Israelites will doubt his divine authority, Moses has asked God His name that he may bolster their faith. What Fox reads as an assurance, in effect, "I will be there for you," remains enigmatic because it leaves open the hearing, "I exist eternally in your eternal doubts that I exist." If God's nature is dialectically related to the nature of human being, the phrase, however it is translated, suggests a haunting negation rather than the positive consumption that Eve offers to Adam.


32. "To rude nations dress is not merely a physical comfort, but a fixed part of social religion, a thing by which a man constantly bears on his body the token of his religion, and which is itself a charm and a means of divine protection. Among African nations, where the sacredness of domestic animals is still acknowledged, one of the few purposes for which a beast may be killed is to get its skin as a cloak; and in the Book of Genesis (ii. 21) the primitive coat of skin is given to the first man by the Deity Himself," William Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (n.p.: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1969), 437.

33. For a powerful graphic illustration, see what was, at the date of its creation in 1983, the largest print ever made in a single piece, Rufino Tamayo's *Los Personajes Atacados por Perros* (woodcut, on permanent display in the Museo Rufino Tamayo in Mexico City).


40. For a summary statement, see his *The Tic Dimension* (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1983).


46. See, for example, the description of a "whirling of the hands, a motion that helps a speaker crystallize an utterance about 'nurturing' by first embodying the idea as a metaphor," in David McNeill, *Hand and Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1992), 257.


48. Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History*, 37: "A theory of experience truly intended to posit the problem of origin in a radical way would then have to start beyond this 'first expression' with experience as 'still mute so to speak' -- that is, it would have to ask: does a mute experience exist, does an infancy fin-fact of experience exist? And, if it does, what is its relationship to language?" My thanks to the Theory and Society Editor who supervised this article for this extraordinarily apposite reference.


50. In anthropology and academic psychology research, sketches or configurations of facial expressions are used to code emotions, and measurements (e.g., of variations in the intensity, persistence, modulation, onset and rise time, range, and liability of recovery from emotional responses) are made by abstracting from the holistic progression of emotional episodes. The quote is from Ross A. Thompson, "Emotion Regulation: A Theme in Search of Definition," in Nathan A. Fox, editor, *The Development of Emotion Regulation: Biological and Behavioral Considerations* (Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development, Serial No. 240, Vol. 59, Nos. 2–3, 1994). In sociology, emotions are most commonly glossed (e.g., "he laughed" or "fighting back tears she said . . .") by a gross, zero-sum type coding. In conversation analysis, the audible history of emotional expression is systematically transcribed and notations of gestures are sometimes added, but such transcripts cannot appreciate emotions either as experienced or witnessed, as they neglect the three-dimensional mobilization of corporeal metaphor that distinguishes crying, laughter, feelings of shame and anger, etc., from talk.

51. For analysis of this determinist proposition as ironically underlying interactionist analysis, see Jack Katz, "Jazz in Social Interaction," *Symbolic Interaction* 17 (Fall 1994), 253–279.

52. Thus, it is true both that, as Goffman states in *Encounters* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-
Merrill, 1961), 55-61, emotions may involve an aspect of hysteria or "flooding out," and at the same time, as Christian Heath argued, with videotaped data in his "Embarrassment and Interactional Organization," in P. Drew and W. Wootton, editors, *Erving Goffman: Exploring the Interaction Order* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1988), 136-160, that emotional conduct is routinely disciplined in metaphorical shape and interactional meaning.
