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Eros in Eden: A Praxis of Beauty in Genesis 3

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Abstract

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By Mari Kim

Offering an analysis of desire in experiences of ambiguity and ambivalence in cultural hybridity, this work builds on a Farleyan understanding of Divine *Eros* to offer a theological read of Genesis 3. The theological concepts of *benevolent creation*, *erotic faithfulness*, and a *praxis of beauty*, offer the hospitality of an interpretive lens that makes visible the faithfulness unfolding in Eden. A good serpent, one "that the Lord God had made," acts with oracular faithfulness towards the woman. Attentive with desire to fulfill the *tov* (the goodness and beauty) of her highest vocation (that of being "God-bearer") the woman engages in a *praxis of beauty* -- a relational "seeing" and delighting in the good and beauty of the Other in Creation that creates partnerships capable of realizing the fullest *tov* of each. Discerning that the fulfillment of her highest *tov* lies in partnering with the tree, the woman eats of it and offers the same to the man. In her *erotic faithfulness*, the woman empowers the fulfillment of humanity's vocation to be like God, or "God-bearers." Thus the man names the woman, Eve, "the mother of all living."

Revealing Eden to be a context shaped by ambiguity and ambivalence, Genesis 3 shows cultural hybridity to be a human condition *both* capable of revealing the vulnerabilities of finitude that structure of all human existence *and* potent with the creative power to generate a sacramental existence. The courageous discernment and decision modeled by Eve demonstrates an existential integrity empowering for cultural hybrids. Eve's *praxis of beauty* demonstrates how a practice of contemplative *eros* not only awakens our consciousness of the sacredness in our experiences, but also enlivens the sacredness that is ours through the sanctity of a human existence. Thus, the story of *eros* in Eden teaches that we are transformed into sacraments that mediate the presence of divine hospitality in Creation. Like Eve, through the integrity of faithful desiring that courageously embraces our highest *tov*, we also become "God-bearers," manifesting our likeness of the Divine who invites us to be co-creators.

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This work is dedicated to:

My loving parents,
Jeong-Ji and Chang-Yull Kim,
Who graciously taught me to see the *top* in life at all times.

And to:

My sons,
Enoch Jungyi and Ethan Jung-Yull Kim-Shinn,
So wonderfully funny, happy, blessed, and wise ~ you are utterly beloved.

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You arrive at enough certainty to be able to make your way,
but it is making it in darkness. Don't expect faith to clear
things up for you. It is trust, not certainty.

~ Flannery O' Connor

The economy of desire is not toward possession. Certainty remains within the economy of possession, and the way of contemplation leads us in the opposite direction. We may wish to assuage the anguish of desire with clarity and certainty, but certainty is a pleasure one must learn to do without. In its place, it is only the more intense burning of desire that is our guide.

~ Wendy Farley

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Introduction

Cultural Hybridity

As a constructive theologian, I write to discover the redemptive possibilities presented in a culturally hybrid existence. In doing so, my particular incarnation as a Korean North American informs the concerns and experiences that focus this particular theological analysis of cultural hybridity. In this work, I understand cultural hybridity to be an existence navigating the complexities of an identity informed by multiple cultural sources.

Theologically, I interpret cultural hybridity as a human condition informed by the desire to inhabit culturally meaningful and appropriate relationships with one's self, others, and the other perduring features of one's environment.¹

As a human condition, I understand cultural hybridity as an experience of self-understanding informed by a *multiplicity of cultural sources*, highlighting that such a genesis imparts a pluralistic ethno-cultural inheritance that resists uniform or clear conceptualization. Suffused with a persistent ambiguity and an enduring ambivalence, the flexible boundaries of

¹Because cultural identity and cultural hybridity exemplify what a better theologian identifies as the “perduring features that constitute the being of something in its...situation,” I am suggesting they offer ontological insight into a way of being human, rather than a form or type of human being. Likewise, in this work, the awareness that a wider community and social sphere exert influence on cultural identities and experiences of cultural hybridity portrays something of the nature of a hybrid's existence more so than offering an interpretation of anthropological type.

In *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition*, Edward Farley helpfully makes a distinction between that which describes specific events and particular entities, as oppose to a recognition of the features that enduringly inform a situation: “The cognitive style of these exploration is reflexive ontology. I call it ontology because it is directed not to contingent events or discrete entities but to perduring features that constitute the being of something in its situation.” Moreover, in distinguishing between characteristics of a human condition and the concept of human nature, he further suggests, “The usage of *being* here is not a static or timeless essence in contrast to process or change but its characteristic powers or ways of existing in the typical and extended situation of that thing. This is why there can be an ontology of a human condition and not just of human nature.” Edward Farley, *Good and Evil: Interpreting a Human Condition*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), Preface. Xix.

cultural identities of hybrid as being “neither fixed in content nor set in contours.” Thus characterized by enduring instability, our self-understandings are continually altering and re-shaping in response to the multiple negotiations that persist for us around the concrete and particular socio-political, cultural and material conditions of our existence.

Such insight is invaluable. It guides us to resist inadequate essentialisms that offer a seductive clarity of oversimplifications that invariably reduce the complex and nuanced reality involved to the mere stereotypical sum of the cultural parts involved. Here I have found cultural theorist Lisa Lowe and her work on Asian American immigrant communities very helpful. As she problematizes essentialized or essentializing understandings of ethnic identity, Lowe offers a helpful way of approaching the problem of knowing ourselves. In the conversation around constructions of understandings of ethnicity and cultural identities, Lowe "troubles" modern tendencies to formulate the "authentic" or "true" "Asian American identity" as having a fixed essence, and advocates for a more postmodern understanding of formulations of culture characterized by the traits of heterogeneity, hybridity and multiplicity. In particular, a valuing of heterogeneity functions as a corrective to what many in the field of Asian North American studies see as the erasure of significant differences that resist fictive generalizations about the incredibly diverse contours and content of Asian North American experiences. For Lowe, the valuing of heterogeneity represents a strategic response to the reality of cultural political economic dominance that Lowe sees as shaping the material and political existence of Asian North Americans.

By nurturing a heterogenic "dialectic of difference and disidentification" within Asian American constructions of culture, Lowe believes that it will be possible to reshape the dynamic of dominance which seeks to generate a particular kind of knowledge and understanding of "Asian American" that is more concerned to control the material and

political existence of Asian immigrant populations within the cultural hegemony of North America. For this reason, she argues that, "...interpreting Asian American culture exclusively in terms of the master narratives of generational conflict and filial relations essentializes Asian American culture, obscuring the particularities and incommensurabilities of class, gender, and national diversities among Asian."²

The exhortation to resist reducing "Asian American identities" to those most recognizable cultural commonalities orients this project to seeking a paradigm of self-understanding that remains open to the transitional nature of a culturally hybrid existence. Epistemologically, the structure of my identity as an Asian North American woman invites the awareness that what self-understanding or "truth" of personhood we can know in cultural hybridity does not emerge fixed in content. Rather, the transitional nature of personhood in cultural hybridity invites the epistemological awareness that "truth" is discerned in a dynamic of relational existence. Appropriated theologically, this means that I locate the truth of who we are as persons, not in the accuracy of a propositional description that is "correct" in content, but in a *dynamic of conscious and relational existence* shaped by the continual negotiations between the multiple possibilities of self-understanding present to us. Trained by the learning of more able theologians, this work brings to awareness how the plurality of cultural self-understandings converging and conflicting in us becomes a divine invitation. Indeed, in our hospitality to the *interior otherness* we encounter in ourselves, we emerge as responsible for authoring the truth of ourselves, and the integrity our wholeness, through the a creative praxis of discernment and decision-making.

² Lisa Lowe, "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, and Multiplicity: Asian American Differences," in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999) pp. 60-83.

Thus, cultural hybridity emerges as a human condition not only capable of revealing the vulnerabilities of finitude that structure of all human existence, but also as a creative and potentially sacramental existence, able to empower our consciousness of the hospitality of divine benevolence presented to us at all times. Moreover, my work as a constructive theologian empowers the conviction that such “seeing,” or conscious attentiveness to our experiences, in this case of desire in cultural hybridity, not only awakens us to the sacredness in our experiences, but also awakens the very sacredness that *is* ours through the sanctity of human existence. Indeed, our intentioned commitment to “seeing” the *tov*, that goodness and beauty, in this existence we share with others, it appears that Genesis 3 teaches us that we are transformed into the very sacraments that mediate the presence of divine hospitality, moment by moment. In the integrity of our desiring and the courageous embrace of the highest and fullest *tov* visioned through our lives, we emerge as co-creators with the Divine who gave us life.

Chapter One

A Story of Immigration and Faith

A Context of Struggle

I remember a photo from my family's album. Misplaced for some time now, it is a close up of my older brother, Yah-Sung, and me as children. Clinging to an unidentifiable pair of grown-up legs (was it my mom?), I am captivated by my brother who stands smartly at attention: the center of the photograph and the object of my interest. Dressed in a crisp summer suit of blue-and-white seersucker completed by white tights -- he is the epitome of children's fashion for the day. The photo has caught a moment: head tilted back, and mouth open wide, my brother is bursting with song. The date is July 1, 1972 – it is my family's final day in Korea.

Beyond the frame of this photo, a group of close friends and family, some 30 strong, have gathered at Kimpo Airport to help us mark our last few hours in Korea. They will send us off with well-wishes as we embark on a pilgrimage that will settle us as new immigrants in Canada. Though I have no immediate recollection of that day, this story has grown to become part of my memory. Embedded in that liminal space of constructed knowledge, it comes courtesy of my father's recollections; I claim it now as my own.

Not long after that photo is taken, at my father's behest, my brother and I team up to sing two farewell songs for the guests gathered. The first is a snappy, Korean pop song about waiting for unrequited love to show up in a café. The second, more solemn and important song causes my brother and I to stand taller at attention. We sing the "Ai-kook-ga," the Korean national anthem, our voices strong and proud to know the song so well. When the last note faded, I am told, there was not a dry eye left. This, too, is a precious

detail I borrow from the treasures preserved in my father's memory.

My parents' decision to emigrate from Korea 36 years ago was framed simply as a permanent journey going in one direction – away. Given the magnitude of the distance, the effort and the concerted resources involved in transplanting our family from Korea to Canada, my parents and those who had come to see us off could not indulge in any expectations of a return. There was an unquestioned permanence to our decision to immigrate. Any talk of future plans focused on hopes for surviving and thriving in Canada: questions about finding secure employment; earnest hopes of good schools with good teachers; the prospect of becoming citizens; the hopes of inviting extended family to join us there, there was no dreaming of a return.

Growing up in Canada, finances and work-related needs were a regular part of my parents' conversations with each other, and eventually, as my siblings and I grew to appreciate the gravity or significance of a particular situation, we also became part of such conversations. I see now that a faith-orientation was clearly at work in my mother's attitude that for each problem we faced, there was a solution to be found; if one could not be found, then she would find a way to make one. When our well-being was at stake, it was as if she knew the goodness of the universe intended her to find a path through the problem. She and my father were well matched that way – both believed and took seriously that our opportunity to immigrate had been a gift. Little wonder that subsequent hardships and struggles were not perceived as grounds for giving up hope, or rendering the thanklessness of complaint. In season and out, we regularly met such trials and tribulations with the conviction: we were blessed.

This awareness of blessedness cultivated an intentionality in my parents expressed frequently in two family practices. Each practice had the effect of cultivating a sense of

equilibrium, and energizing our desire for something good. And it seemed my parents knew how to allow the strength of their faith to work with what we hoped for, to keep perspective when financial difficulties or other challenges became troubling. One practice involved a visioning of the future; the other was investing hope in the present.

A Vision for the Future

Visioning for the future involved looking ahead and recognizing why it was that we were dealing with the variety of problems confronting us. As I became aware of my parents' future hopes, they did not involve finding bigger houses or new cars, securing the latest fashion or expanding business successes. Though at times there was a dream-like quality to the futures envisioned, neither pretense nor fantasy was indulged in visions of the future -- except perhaps for the perpetual wish about winning the lottery! In hindsight, the dream-like quality of the visioning was of critical importance to the future we became oriented to because my parents were not ruminating on possibilities that were fantastical, unreal, or imaginary.

Rather, dreams or visions they practiced and encouraged in us had the features of being grounded in reality and aspiring to virtue of excellence. What made them dream-like was that they inspired our regard for the possibilities before us, and introduced the wondrous possibility that *we* might have a relationship with such goodness. Embedded in my memory is a particular conversation that followed after the three of us had taken our evening baths. We were still in our 210 Woolner Ave. apartment home, so I was not yet in grade 2. My mom was helping us kids get dressed and somehow the conversation was about what we might be when we grew up. My mother was asked for her ideas, and after a thoughtful pause I remember her smiling as she said she wanted us to become a *boobyung han*

sabram like Albert Schweitzer and receive the Nobel Peace prize. *Hoolyung han sabram* was a term describing a person of excellence that expressed appreciation for the virtuous nature of the person as one who was not only gifted with skill but exercised competence with exceptional virtue. When we asked for clarification, my mom conveyed the understanding that the Peace prize was given to those who served the world to bring peace. Though ignorant of the exceptional distinction associated with the Nobel Peace prize, it was established as a marker of excellence – what to aspire to. When a trip to the public library revealed that I shared a birthday with Albert Schweitzer, the missionary doctor who earned a Nobel Peace prize for his work in Africa, it seemed important news with to share with my mother.

Significantly, applying ourselves with hard work and investing ourselves in efforts to serve the good of others seemed part of whatever equation we envisioned possible for our futures. Whatever dreams of excellence my parents encouraged, they involved the understanding that hard work and determination to do good defined whatever expressed excellence. Hence when a revival during my junior high school years lead me to commit myself to a life of faith, serving God in Africa expressed an understanding of the epitome of faithful virtue. Moreover, our family's experience of immigration ensured that my dreams were not bound by geographical limits. For example, in the question of which colleges to attend, the names of the Ivy League universities across the border featured prominently.

Nurturing these dreams, the historical specificity of their content was important. It meant that what we hoped for was anchored concretely in reality our dreams continually reminded us that what we hoped were real and actual possibilities, not impossible fantasies. Indeed, no matter how improbable they seemed at times, we dreamed what was possible. Accordingly, the Nobel Prize had a long history of recipients whose names were known and

whose stories were familiar to us; the Ivy League universities accepted Canadians and offered need-based scholarships.³ In this way, the good things we dreamt of remained as real as the problems that invited our anxieties and fears. The historical viability of our dreams could “talk back” to our anxieties. Whenever fears threatened and made our problems appear more “real” than our dreams, the concrete, specificity of historical evidence offered witness that the good we longed was grounded in some historical reality.

A Hope in the Present

The second practice offered a healthy counter-balance to the first practice of desiring in the future because it involved embracing happiness or investing in *hope in the present*. It was not unusual for my father to spontaneously call for a road trip or for my mother to suggest a picnic menu to enjoy. My parents were not invulnerable to the awareness of wholesale risk permeating our immigrant existence. So even in the absence of immediate difficulties or struggles, I grew up aware of a low-lying sense of vulnerability, cumulatively growing, built upon fears of experiencing more loss or harm than already endured. Unsurprisingly, any financial difficulty, unexpected or not, reports of communal conflict, or news of struggles troubling others far away could activate a debilitating emotional weariness. Akin to melancholy and depression, this emotional weariness expressed the anticipatory expectation of dread, suggesting: hereafter things will be right.

³ My father was very consistent in emphasizing the importance of concreteness: when I expressed desire to engage in missionary efforts during my college years, my father insisted I equip myself with the skills of a teacher, doctor, dentist, or any otherwise-skilled professional who could offer concrete services to benefit any community I approached with the intention to proselytize. His point was clear: the truth good news could not be mere rhetoric. If I hoped to offer witness of my faith, it would be most effective when concretely embodied in practices of work that offered substantive care and actualized support for a community’s well-being.

My parents seemed to resist the potential encroachment of such a fixation each time they announced that we were taking a road trip or packing a barbeque lunch for after church. These decisions stood out as lavish affirmations of the present good. For whatever else was not right, for whatever else we could not do or did not have, my parents' decision insisted that hard work and struggle did not constitute the whole of our immigrant existence. While they modeled the wisdom of deferred enjoyment elsewhere, the spontaneity of weekend roadtrips or picnics at a National Park were regular parts of my growing up. However many squabbles my siblings and I managed to orchestrate, they failed to disrupt my parents' contentment at providing opportunities for us to be a "happy family" together. Whether dropping in to see our cousins, or eating roasted beef wrapped in lettuce with *gochujang*, my parents continually created opportunities for us to enjoy the day together. In the face of difficulties that could otherwise invite despair or dread, my parents chose to be aware of the good to be experienced even in the midst of need and lack. On such days, the message of their faith in the present was clear: we are blessed *already*, and life is good *now*. They regularly pointed out that there was plenty to give thanks for. My parents' insistence on appreciating the good in our current lives, that is, *in the present*, remains among the most powerful teachings on hope known to me. The gnawing anxieties that might have otherwise have crippled my parents' with fear were shushed as they resisted dread, and regularly enacted hospitality towards the good in our lives.

So my parents envisioned the future optimistically, and practiced being conscious of the hope they knew in the present. Their struggles were still very real -- there wasn't any suggestion they had miraculously disappeared or that they could be denied -- but the desire to continue to *hope* and maintain *trust* while working hard, and investing effort into building our lives, was a powerful act of resistance. It was a refusal to allow the problem, or even an

insidious fear of the problem, to exercise absolutizing power over our expectations.⁴ By faith they held fast to the grace hoped for, open to what good creative solutions and sheer effort might allow.

Such a perspective had implications for the kind of relationships or practices of community my parents embraced. The faith of my parents did not call them away from others, or suggest they were somehow superior and impervious to what those who did not share a faith in God might suffer. If anything, the conviction of blessedness secured by faith seemed to make it possible for my parents to sympathize with feeling, whenever the struggles of others came into view or hearing. My mother spent hours, many times late into the night after a long day of working and caring for us, lending a sympathetic ear to both acquaintances and strangers who were told she was a wise and caring soul. More than a few times, I came home from school to find strangers crying in our living room, receiving what comfort that one or both of my parents could offer through witness to their suffering. What became increasingly evident over time was how some of the painful struggles and suffering we had experienced (my parents and later, we children) empowered insightful depths to our sympathy and a grounded knowledge of the signature features of the difficult situation or pain being endured as we witnessed.

Without suggesting there is inherent redemptive value in dehumanizing racism, enduring gender discrimination, the pain of silence forced on those whose native tongue is

⁴ Transformations and twists were common in the family histories that merged in my parents' marriage. There was no illusion that either effort or desire could control or predict what would happen in life. But this insight could cut both ways: just as hopeful dreams might be stolen by fear, so equally, fears prophesied by anxieties could yield to the realization of dreams; dreams could be manifest in hope, just as anxieties could be realized in fear. This flexibility reflected a maturity of faith that was not secured by illusory reassurances, ungrounded truths or unrealities.

not known, humiliating cruelty over misread cultural cues, separation from loved ones and more such incidents, it is necessary to acknowledge that invaluable critical awareness and understanding were mediated by our particular experiences of struggle and suffering. The faith we had inherited from my father's side of the family did not suggest that trusting in God's love separated us from the suffering of others; on the contrary, the call of love invited us to discover how our suffering and struggle empowered our empathy and an ethic of relationship that did not regard others as diminished when their vulnerability was exposed.

1.2 A Grief Unspoken

There were also experiences of our immigration that made hope quiet with ache. These experiences of loss seemed to take the life of breath away, leaving in its wake only surrounding walls of grief so opaque, the present lost any future. Here, the imperceptible losses, those small hopes so humble as to be (almost) forgotten, the disappointments never-imagined to come –

a mother's soup so delicious, so clean, so good to taste,

not to be tasted again...

a handkerchief she sewed with tiny stitches so perfectly by hand, *unexpectedly lost*...

a pantry once stocked -- shelf after shelf, lined with countless little jars,

filled with home-pickled delicacies,

each thoughtfully labeled by hand,

name and date

never to be found that way again...

a father's voice and glad smile welcoming his return from school

his coat to grip tightly in a train filled with desperate refugees
suddenly taken away gone without a good bye

Pain would break open grief from unspeakable depths, and hearts confounded by
pain would weep voicelessly from ache. No lament, no consolation. Only empty sorrow.

Such experiences, replete with awareness of irretrievable loss would cause a deep
silence to wrap around the nameless pain of my parents. They lived, and the gift of daily
work and need to care for us eventually drew them back again...but they would be lost for a
time, faith and all.

A decade or so after we left Korea, a rare overseas call unexpectedly brought news
that my mother's beloved mother had passed away. When my mother began weeping, she
wept with a profound, ancient anguish, her sobs conveying such heartbreak and ache. As
unspeakable grief enveloped my mother, she would be lost to us, and perhaps to herself, for
a while thereafter. Before our move to Canada, chronic illness had taken away my
grandmother's ability to speak, so in all the time we had been in Canada (more than a decade
at that point) my mother had not heard the words of assurance, nor strength of faith, nor
encouragement of love as found only in her mother's voice. Even so, from the beautiful
details of caring embedded in the few stories I heard told of my maternal grandmother, I felt
that my mother felt deep solace in knowing she still shared the world with her mother.

It seems infinitely possible to me now that the knowledge we shared a world with
one we love could allow daughter and mother, even separated by thousands of miles, an
ocean's width and the inability to speak words, to nevertheless continue to share care for
each other, receiving and sending love to each other in their thoughts and memories. I
remember how my mother's face grew luminous with love as she smilingly described how
skillfully her mother had knit for her a beautiful red sweater of fine wool. My grandmother

had made it for her to wear secretly under her school uniform so that in cold weather, when strict rules forbid anything to be worn over school uniforms but unheated classrooms prevented many from focusing on their work, my mother would not suffer from lack of warmth. So my mother told of secretly layering the beautifully knit, fine-gauge wool garment under her school uniform every day, loving her mother for the warmth it provided her. My mother's tender memory of her mother's thoughtfulness made the gift of the sweater so much more a precious treasure.

But now, my mother was thousands of miles away from that first home she had known, thousands of miles away from the memories of a childhood and youth she had cherished. My mother had enduring our new life, thousands of miles away from her beloved mother. And now, with her mother's passing, my mother would never again know meet her mother's loving gaze, or share a glad smile. Our immigration had not caused my grandmother's passing, but it had been costly to the relationship my mother might have enjoyed with her mother, in the twilight of my grandmother's life. My mother did not just visit her mother as she would have had they not been an ocean apart; she could not pick up a phone and speak with her, not only because such calls were extremely costly, but because my grandmother's infirmity prevented her from speaking clearly or well. My mother could no longer take us to visit her mother on special occasions; my mother had not been able to hold her hand as she visited my grandmother's bedside, – all as she would have done, had we not immigrated to Canada.

The choice to be the mother she was to us, and the wife she was to my father, left my mother bereft of the ability to be daughter she was to my grandmother. When news of my grandmother's death came – my mother was unable to mourn her mother's passing. The constraints of our immigrant existence prevented my mother from being present to honor

her mother's passing. My mother had little opportunity to slow down, to pause, to experience the sacred space of a funeral when the compassion of respectful silence and contemplative stillness could receive her grief. In such times, silence seemed the only voice capable of confessing the inadequacy of hope; there was no consolation to be found, anywhere. A family worship was all that our family could offer for my mother to lament a relationship that had to be treasured in heart and memory from afar. What faith she had to speak then with others about their loss and longing, was borne out of her struggles in carving out a new life in a strange land.

A Faith Inherited

I cannot recall now what events precipitated the times we gathered on the living room floor for family worship, but the gathering call was made by my father. As a teen, such worship times often seemed to me a guise for having us practice our Korean, especially as my parents would choose one of us to read the bible in our halting Korean as part of the half-hour worship that included scripture reading, hymn-singing, and intercessory prayer. Encircled together, such family-worship times were a practice of trust, and a practice of desire, and a practice of confession that could express hope of faith in the face struggles that seemed at times capable of undoing of hope.

If our family-worship times were *a practice of trust*, then the stories my parents told from their memories of childhood were *a practice of remembering*. Remembering was intended to stave off the encroaching loss of connection generated as a new life in Canada left us bereft of a context through which to glean organic knowledge of our parents' lives and family histories in Korea. The stories that connected us to our parents' lives in Korea were

fascinating to me: an endless source of learning. They would emerge unexpectedly from unknown dimensions within my parents. Invariably they took the form of a particular memory – whether the recollection of a detail about tiny crabs scurrying across ocean sand or an unexpectedly life-changing event in the stunning news of a beloved older brother's drowning. In fact, through our teenage and college years, I looked forward to the long family road trips we took, because the hours of driving through the night were an opportune time to ask questions and learn more about who my parents were.

We took these trips, first in our yellow and black Dodge Dart and later in the more spacious blue Chevrolet station wagon. We would decide spontaneously at the end of a week, to take the drive to New Jersey to visit my father's 4th brother for the weekend or make the nine-hour drive to visit with our 3rd uncle and our favorite cousins, who lived in Chicago. We even drove from Toronto to Florida several times so my father could visit his youngest brother in Coral Springs. To prevent my father from falling asleep as he drove marathon-style through the night, I'd ask my dad to tell us about his memories from his childhood. My father shared his early memories of family life in Yong Jong (“...that was in old Manchuria,”) of fleeing communists in Seoul, of coming to Canada to study at McGill, of traveling Europe on a YMCA scholarship, and of our earliest years in Canada.⁵ One story explained the massive scar and concave indent on the side of his torso: he had a rib sawed out in an operation without anesthesia. Another told of his leaving his family because of growing concerns that he would be seen and drafted by the army. He would return to learn that communists whose practice in other cities was to execute Christian ministers had

⁵ See Appendix A.

kidnapped my grandfather.⁶ My grandmother spent many days, weeks, months, thereafter searching for him. She went from prison facilities to authorities, asking if anyone knew where he might be. Of course, she searched in vain. In his absence, my grandmother was left to raise their remaining 6 sons on her own. However endless the miles of road or countless the hours of driving, it was impossible not to treasure the very journey itself as much as the destinations at which our family arrived on these road trips.

My mother's stories happened more frequently in the kitchen where many of her hours after a long day's work were invested. It was busy helping her prepare meals, but once in a while, when she was preparing something in advance, for a picnic the next day, or perhaps pickling something to be eaten several months later, she would talk about a memory related to something we were preparing. Once, while marinating crabs in soy sauce, my mom recalled that her mother would pickle crabs in the same way, but that she had helped find the crabs on a beach. As she told her stories, her eyes would become very animated, as if she were somehow seeing the very shores where she had helped find the tiny crabs, so her mom could make the tastiest version of the side dish we were helping her prepare now. She laughed as she described how the crabs on a beach near her home moved so quickly, and her enjoyment of the memory was so contagious, it was impossible not to feel we had somehow missed out on a great time by not being there doing what she had described. She used a simple hand gesture to show us how very small the crabs had been: "This small!" she would explain, showing us her smallest fingernail for emphasis, responding to our curiosity to know how small.

Another time, after dinner, too full of good food to leave the kitchen table, we

⁶ See Appendix A, p. 15.

enjoyed sitting around and hearing stories of my mom's college experiences. That was the time we learned that she had listened to musicians from the U.S. while growing up, not only Korean ones. Responding to our questions about which songs – we were curious to know if we knew any of the ones she had liked -- she told us she had loved a song called “Greenfields” unknown to us. It simply did not suit the three of us not to know what mom's favorite English-lyric song in college had been! So we begged her, and would not stop begging to hear it, even when she protested that she did not remember it all so well, until she yielded to our pleading and sang it for us in her sweet, clear voice.

As these stories stretched across time and space, my parents walked us back to places and experiences and histories we had not known. They allowed us to see from their perspective as they introduced people, places, and sometimes feelings and thoughts. Most precious to me was how their stories revealed something of my parents' desire to be known by their children in the process of making known what and how experiences shaped them and their lives well before we joined them. As their memories stretched across generations and details of history and time, the stories always increased awareness of how unfamiliar the cultural contexts of my parents could be to us at times. They spoke a comfortable mix of English with Korean, pausing when we asked for meanings about unfamiliar phrases or words. I came to love the rich silences that made up those brief pauses, almost as much as the descriptions that followed. Our interruptions allowed us to build greater integrity into the sharing of my parents' stories. In our requests for clarification, every disconnect we exposed was an opportunity to construct a new, clearer connection established through shared understanding.

In our interruptions and questions, we revealed something of our earnest desire to know our parents as they hoped to be known, while we honored our implicit desire to be

known, too. This ability to confess both knowing and uncertainty was a freedom I found with our parents that was frequently lacking in conversation with other adults whose various assumptions about what we knew/did not know were rarely made clear to us. Significantly, there was no insistence that our lack of familiarity distanced us from grasping the significance of a memory, because more was being communicated than just cultural background. In the attentiveness of our listening, it seem possible to grasp how the ways in which the past lives of our parents in Korea remained precious to them, even with the losses of family and friendships, and familiar places and things that lingered.

Such stories wove the fragile threads of a collective consciousness between us, my siblings and me, and the memories of our parents. They offered us glimpses of larger family histories from Kong-Ju, Manchuria and Seoul, drawing back the curtains on some of the “roots and routes” converging in the new life we embraced as Korean-Canadians in Toronto. I came to understand our family’s immigration to Canada as connected to an older narrative as we learned that my father’s family had come to be in Korea as a result of emigrating from Manchuria. I do not remember when I first realized that my siblings and I bore testimony to three generations of resilience in the midst of political struggle and warring strife. My paternal grandparents had migrated to Korea in the 1950’s, realizing their family would not be able to survive the social, political and economic de-stabilization brought on by the communist take-over of Manchuria. Likewise, growing anxious as they witnessed Korea’s increasing political turmoil surfacing in the socio-economic realities of Seoul, my parents’ decision to immigrate emerged, not simply a result of personal ambitions, but as part of a larger exodus by Koreans in the early 1970’s seeking alternatives to re-living the turbulent social and economic realities that had plagued their youth.

When the opportunity to emigrate to Canada presented itself, my parents traded the

limited security and comforts of their established life in Korea to risk the limitless uncertainties of an immigrant existence in Canada. I know now our immediate prospects in Canada remained bereft of certainty about housing or gainful employment. As mother of two young sons now, it is difficult to imagine how I might have experienced what my parents were facing: we were flying to a country we did not know, with no place to live, no viable options for employment, nor any knowledge of how we would manage. If my parents had any reservations or concerns about the multitude of uncertainties, they did not let on in any way that registered with me.

Likely, tenderness of age kept me blissfully unaware of how much struggle (and loss) our immigration to Canada involved, but my parents also modeled a remarkably hopeful determination to thrive that surely helped to fuel my misperception. I would take for granted the absence of a core angst and fundamental insecurity in my parents' responses to situations that clearly distressed or dismayed them. It would be decades before I understand the subtleties I witnessed, distinguishing my parents' hopeful determination to thrive, from a driven need to prove one's worth, or the worth of one's decision to immigrate. Yet in time, and as I re-heard our family's histories, I came to understand: in our immigration, my parents had embraced the faith-conviction that we were already blessed.

1.3 A Conviction of Blessedness

Characteristic of immigrant families, I experienced an abiding awareness that the faith of past generations and the hope of future generations converged in the efforts of the present generation we represented. The stories my siblings and I heard about my dad's earlier years with my grandparents increased our awareness that our identities were informed by journeys begun by others before we were born. My father does not seem to remember

very much of the experience he had making his way with his family from Manchuria to Seoul. The ominous presence of growing military conflict inspired no confidence in the future for my grandparents who were beset by encroaching poverty and an increasing lack of resources available to civilians. It is significant that my grandparents, in choosing to flee Manchuria, had not been willing to make such a decision just for their family: if it was safety they sought, it would be for the congregation as well, not merely their own children. Particular memories of my father's experiences with his family fleeing the violence and danger of a communist military occupation vibrated with emotional energy, even while he spoke matter-of-factly, as if just conveying information, and not his experience of what he was narrating. My grandfather is remembered for making the reason clear: he was a shepherd and could not simply leave the flock to protect himself or better his family's lot. So my grandparents partnered to help build up the faith, vision, and courage of the families in their congregation and moved only after a majority of them were prepared to risk the move to safer political and economic realities being reported in South Korea.

If necessity compelled my father's parents to risk of becoming refugees, love inspired the desperate desire to protect their children and their congregation, and secure for them a future free from threat of harm. And in the absence of certainty, with so much that was so precious at stake, it was nothing less than faith in God's compassion and faithfulness to them that empowered my grandparents with the courage and patience to endure the unexpected hardships that were yet to come. Theirs was not a faith that could indulge in obsessions over church doctrine or denominational polity when the fundamental protection and survival of their children and the several families they were leading remained unsecured.

The fundamental reality of hunger, cold, need for shelter, lack of money, social and political vulnerability to violence and loss shaped their existence, first as refugees, and

further still once they had reached Seoul. Shaped by refugee concerns and relationships, the flame of faith was fanned in the midst of seeking the presence of God in coping with the pressing details of survival. The generation of my father and his brothers navigated some three decades of profound personal struggle all tolled. To learn of their lives now, they each speak in some way of choosing to embrace the difficult legacy of faith exemplified in my grandparents. And in the faithfulness of their lives, my father and uncles appear to me to embody testimonies of abundant consolations of faith offered to my grandparents by a God faithful even beyond their lifetimes.

If my father did not seem to despair easily, even as he faced the more difficult realities of negotiating an immigrant existence, I realized it was in no small part due to the resilience of faith in hope that had been cultivated in him through the extreme circumstances of struggle, suffering, and loss already familiar to him. His past explained to me why my father's desires seemed so simple: he wanted us to be a happy family. He delighted in our spending time as a family on vacations and road trips that gave him the opportunity to visit his brothers as they began to immigrate with their families to the States. Even in his work, my father invited our participation, so that we were part of his life there -- much as his own parents appeared to have done in their ministry work. Whether it was translating for immigrants in court, helping them find housing, teaching them about the process of securing employment, creating ESL classes for seniors, establishing computer training courses or organizing summer heritage language classes for the generation of children who did not know how to speak Korean, there was an equilibrium I saw in my father. It enabled him to focus on his solution-generating work of helping Toronto Koreans secure community support in their new lives as Canadian immigrants.

I believe his equilibrium was an expression of faith made possible only after

discovering how he and his brothers could experience the tremendous hardships and loss known in their younger years, yet still emerge capable and desiring to create a life of hope and happiness for themselves and their own families. Moving beyond the trauma of those decades of loss, the faith imparted to my father and his brothers appears to have endured. Looking back, each of the brothers chose the option of engaging leadership positions in student Christian movements and faith organizations, serving in churches when they attended colleges, even through the war. In due time, when each married and embraced the companionship of their own spouses, secured their professional lives, and welcomed their own children to protect and love -- an abundance of emotional stability and material security did not cause their faith to be discarded. Though surely forged and tested in the crucible of need, theirs was not a faith to be discarded when need fell way. Whether as Sunday School teachers, deacons, elders, ministers, chaplains, or even denomination moderators – the sons of my grandparents continued to choose lives serving faith, in honor of faith.

Talk of God, and faith in God's love, involved descriptions of the choices and practices of faith kept by my grandparents. And significantly, these descriptions invariably included the recognition that keeping faith could prove hard, painful, costly. This insight remains an invaluable gift. The "benefits" associated with keeping faith did not involve immunity from the hardship, or insulation from loss. Faith clearly had not shielded my father and his family from suffering, or struggle, or pain. If anything, the story of my grandfather's arrest and death proved faith could be at the heart, even the very cause, of such experiences. Such stories about my family's experiences before immigration made clear to me that whatever the nature of faith, it was not a special power that exempted us from either hardship or suffering. Whatever faith's virtue, it was embraced despite and in the

midst of, hardship and struggle.

I cannot know why each - my father, my grandmother, my uncles - did not discard a faith that ushered so much loss and suffering to their lives. When they lost my grandfather, even without the trauma of not knowing what had happened to him for two decades, the hideous context of war made it excruciating for my grandmother and sons to eek out a living sufficient for all seven of them. Yet, what survives that generation despite their suffering, and what has been passed on to my generation is an example stronger than any story. Having counted the cost, they maintain an awareness of keeping the faith as an honor and a privilege we embrace as a family.

I understood the nature of faith most concretely through my parents' practice of prayer. My father would come to pray by my bedside at night. He would find me, usually before I slept, and pray quietly aloud for God to protect and guide me, and to help our family. I suspect that on nights that I slept early, he came even after I was asleep, praying over me. My mother's praying was more often at meal times, when father was with us. She, in her gentle voice, would ask humbly that we be blessed with strength of courage, and kindness, and forgiveness, and love for each other.⁷ From such experiences, I came to understand that more than something to be merely believed, as in assented to, the nature of faith was a trusting expression of love. In their act of praying for and with us, my parents' faith emerged as expressing love for us and entrusting their hope for our well-being to a God whom, they trusted, loved us, too.

If this was the nature of their faith, it seems clear why faith was not abandoned when

⁷ My mother's mere praying for such things in the quietness of her voice would inspire repentance in me, and I suspect my siblings, if we had been arguing and fighting before sitting down to the meal.

my grandfather was taken. As an expression of love, faith would have enabled my grandmother and her sons to express the trusting hope, that one who mattered most to them – even when far from the reach of their help and care -- mattered also to God. If faith could express love and trust, then it was a powerful spiritual antidote to the futility that must assaulted my grief-stricken grandmother and her sons as, day after day, no news of my grandfather's whereabouts or well-being could be gleaned. Thus, the understanding of faith I inherited from my family was more powerful than mere believing. I did not learn faith as a matter of doctrinal or intellectual assent. I came to know it as that practice of trust that could express what I loved, and that I loved, to a God who would receive my love with love.

For better or for worse, in season and out of season, to ask assistance to face the frightening or just to bear what was unbearable, my family prayed. I became convinced of the trustworthiness of faith because my parents prayed: whether good or bad for all things, I grew to trust that the God to whom we were praying loved us and cared about us no matter the circumstances we found ourselves in because parents had modeled such a trust in God for us: loving us and loving our lives by trusting all things to God prayer.

Embracing immigration was an opportunity for my parents to practice this faith – as was their refusal to complain. Understood this way, faith did not inspire complacency in my parents, or suggest we could indulge in any sense of entitlement associated with knowing ourselves loved of God. If leaving a country that had survived a war, struggle and suffering were normative experiences, then hardship – however unwarranted and unwelcome – could be expected along the way for our generation also. The faith journey of my father's earlier life made it very clear to us that God's favor did not exempt any from suffering or struggle. Such things were undeniably a part of our human condition. Mediated by trust in the care of God, my parents did not expect life to behave predictably, or with predictable rewards, nor

did they find life controllable. Encountering the unexpected and unimagined, as we did as immigrants, any understanding of faith that promised control would have seemed wooden and fake, at best.

For my grandparents, faith was lived as practice of resistance in a time when danger, lack, loss, and need dominated day-to-day living. Faith empowered courage to refute doubt when hardship, struggle, suffering or even loss suggested the absence of God's love or the inability of God's power to save us. This meant that experiences of harm and hurt, loss and struggle, even suffering at the hands of others, could not be taken as evidence that God's care and love for us had diminished. No matter our distress and upset (as real as that of my grandmother and her sons gripped with the terrifying news of my grandfather's capture); nor tempted as we might be to despair (none of my grandmother's persistence resulted in receiving any information about where my grandfather was imprisoned); and however much our suffering and struggle seemed to offer conclusive evidence that God does not care or will not save, such things could not be taken as evidence that God has abandoned us to others or ourselves.

When we struggled, as families naturally struggle in maturing together, we also struggled because we were navigating an immigrant existence that influenced how we were together as a family and who we were on our own. Seen this way, my parents understood themselves – and us – to be entrusted with the vocation of overcoming our struggles and of flourishing. In the process, we were being made capable of helping others to do the same. Our experiences made our parents increasingly more competent to assist others. Whether helping a new family hunting for apartments or applying for jobs, whether teaching Korean to children, or English as a second language to seniors, whether serving as an interpreter in court cases, or for social workers involved with other Korean families, whether counseling

around issues of conflicting values between parents and children, or changing gender paradigms with couples, it seemed that faith produced in them, and through them, produced in us, the capacity to serve others despite our own vulnerabilities, and mediate blessing to them.

Finally, because the faith we inherited taught us to expect that God, in the power of God's love, would eventually be presented as blessing through (and not only in spite of) the challenges we faced, it was possible to expect life would communicate the reality of divine blessing. As we practiced a Hebrews 11.1 faith, embracing whatever we came to face with "...the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen..." my parents' priorities modeled the desire to overcome the obstacles we faced, but also expressed a commitment to see the faithfulness of God transform our struggles into insight and power to help others. Our ability to bear witness to the truth of blessing already embedded in our existence did happen, but not by intention: the knowing emerged as we experienced the resources and limits of our own existence.

Do I contradict myself?

Very well, then I contradict myself,

I am large,

I contain multitudes.

- Walt Whitman

Chapter Two

A Paralysis of Desire: Which Good?

2.1 *Competing Cultural Paradigms*

My earliest kindergarten memory is of needing to use the bathroom. The whole class was sitting on the carpeted floor, gathered together to listen to Ms. Arnup read to us for story time. At home, I had learned to identify such needs quietly to my parents whenever we were in public. I knew the classroom rule required us to ask the teacher for permission “to go.” But it was not free time, or quiet work time, when I could approach the teacher with a private request. Moreover, given the nature of story time -- an activity in which students were silent and still -- I was hard pressed to know whether it was appropriate to interrupt the teacher with a question, much less for such a personal need. My parents had taught me that interrupting a talking adult, especially in a public setting, was a form of disrespect: we should wait until the adult finished talking before asking a question. It was clear the teacher would not finish talking until the story was done -- and by that time, my question might come too late.

2.2 *A Crisis of Agency*

While the physical urgency was unrelenting, I was profoundly confused, and embarrassed about making a personal need known so publicly to a class of strangers. How could I know what to do? I did not know how best to make my concerns known, or who to ask assistance from in navigating through my uncertainties. I understood English well enough, and I was keenly attentive to cultural cues that could inform me of significant social and cultural dynamics. Newness and age rendered me socially shy and entirely reluctant to experiment with untested behaviors such as turning to a neighboring student -- even if only

to whisper a question whose answer might have proven helpful.

I had an accident that day.

The carpet was dark with a wet, tell-tale stain. How could I best avoid having my accident noticed? Should I rise with everyone else after story time, or wait until later? I rose with the rest of the class when told to return to our seats, not wanting linger and draw unwanted attention to myself. Of course, the teacher discovered the accident and drew everyone's attention to the evidence of the accident, asking who had made the wet stain. I shook my head as every one else did. Still, eventually, the teacher approached me. I suppose the matching stain on the backside of my dress gave me away. She drew me aside to speak to me about it.

2.3. *Frustrated Obedience*

Even at four, I was frustrated to grasp that my teacher, the authority present in this context, did not understand *why* the accident had happened. It was not, as she first surmised, because I had found the story was so good I had been reluctant to go to the bathroom. As if. (Where is the child able to focus on a story when she has to go pee?) Nor was she correct in guessing I lacked cultural competency of the classroom expectations and process involved. With distress, I recognized that my teacher failed to grasp that I faced two conflicting cultural understandings of correct behavior; when presented with competing expectations and conflicting understandings of virtue, I had not known how to navigate the better virtue between the two different definitions.

New to the school, new to kindergarten, unfamiliar with my classmates and teacher, and afflicted with a profound and earnest desire to do the right thing, not even a clear and nuanced knowledge of the behaviors expected of me had delivered me from the humiliation

of an accident and the frustration of failed obedience. As well-informed as I had been, the usual promise of clarity - to provide the illumination necessary to make an appropriate decision based on adequate knowledge - proved falsely optimistic. While being informed and knowledgeable might usually have fulfilled the hope promised when clear and accurate knowledge is filtered through a singular clarity, the culturally hybrid existence I was inhabiting rendered such hopes false. This is to say that cultural hybridity, as a context or existence informed by multiple and competing values and expectations, demonstrated most effectively the frustrating inadequacy of mere clarity to illumine what is good and right. In the face of multiple and competing clarities about the virtuous path to take, I felt helplessly over-informed.

2.4. *The Inadequacy of Obedience*

The paralysis of indecision inevitably eliminated any further need for me to debate my options. I was left to face consequences that were inconceivably embarrassing for my four-year self. The vulnerability I felt after being discovered as having had the accident was truly frightening to face. I remember hoping that the inevitable shame of discovery might somehow be less than the disgrace of having broken classroom rules, disrespected the teacher, or dishonored my parents – each prospect seeming worse than last. When the teacher pulled me aside and emphatically reiterated that I must raise my hand whenever I had to go to the bathroom, I remember utter frustration. I *knew* the rules! How could I explain that the accident had not happened from a lack of knowledge: I knew the class rules, as well as those my family had imparted to me about respecting elders and public forums. The paralysis of decision-making I could not articulate involved my confusion about *which* “rules” I should follow. Keenly desiring to do the right thing, to be obedient to virtue, it had

been the multiple “right ways” to act that had rendered both my knowledge of the rules and my virtuous desire more than inadequate.

Too Much Clarity

It was paradoxically an overabundance of clarity – and not its lack -- about what constituted virtue that obfuscated my understanding of the most appropriate course of action to take in that situation. The confusion of ambiguity – a lack of clarity – that I encountered was most interestingly precipitated by a multiplicity of options – a plurality of possibilities of what I could do. The source of ambiguity, or the source of my lack of clarity, was not an ignorance of knowledge but the multiplicity and plurality of clarities. I was confronted with more than one option.

The presence of multiple sources of expectations introduced by different cultural values created a context of cultural hybridity for me. The ambiguity I experienced, therefore, through that context of culturally hybridity involved an overabundance of clarity that resulted in a failure of authority. Committed as I was to honoring my parents, and by virtue of their teaching, of honoring my teacher, I was confused as to whose instruction to follow if honoring one code of conduct resulted in my violating the values honored by the other authoritative voice in my life.

If only I knew to whom I was more accountable, or perhaps if I could discern which priorities or values would be of paramount concern to both my teacher and my parents, then it would be clear to me what the most appropriate “right” response was. As I experienced ambiguity that day, I desired more than anything to understand how to negotiate between competing expectations, to know which approach to virtue was authorized as more

appropriate over the other.

Unable to decide between the cultural expectations and values vying for priority, I struggled with ambiguity. This ambiguity did not emerge from a lack of clarity, but as a result of *too much* clarity, as it were, because I was confronted with more one understanding of how to be virtuous, and the options conflicted. Which was more virtuous? Which was the “better” good: the deference and discretion that counted as virtue to my family (i.e. do not interrupt your elders, be discreet about private matters), or the forthrightness that constituted proper classroom behavior according to the teacher (i.e. raise your hand if you need to go to the bathroom)? Neither commitment to obey the good, nor clarity about what was good, offered me sufficient help in that dilemma. Despite no lapse in my desire, and no ignorance of knowledge I failed to fulfill virtue that day -- faltering because I did not know *which* good to obey. Yet this clash of competing clarities was, alone, not enough to generate a crisis of authority. The presence of multiple clarities precipitated a crisis of authority *only* because I desired to do “the right thing.” In the convergence of clarities with desire, I experienced something of the tragic. In the absence of a desire to do the right thing, or to act with virtue, the nature of the ambiguity generated by the presence of multiple and competing understandings of the good, would remain a mere matter of clarity. However, in the presence of a desire for the good, to do the good, to be virtuous, the existence of more than one possibility of how to accomplish this, introduces a crisis of authority.

2.6 A Crisis of Agency

In the absence of understanding myself as having agency, of being authorized to know what to do, I did not recognize myself as having permission to make decisions between competing understandings of what constituted virtue in a new context. I wanted

nothing more than to turn to an authority, to consult some guidance, for the answer I needed. If knowledge about a virtuous possibility for action stimulated desire to be obedient in virtue, then the confusion that there was more than one culturally-sanctioned understanding of the right thing to do in stimulated still keener desire to embody the virtue was most appropriate to the context.

2.7 *Failure of Authority*

In my situation, no amount of desire to obey, comply, or otherwise act appropriately (though I desired very intensely, even agonizingly, in this case) was adequate to effect the fulfillment of any virtue. Despite my intention to honor the authorities in my life, despite the desire compliant in obedience to what was asked of me, the plurality of values resulted in a conflict of clear but competing directives that left no voice authoritative enough to follow. The disempowering failure of authority was further echoed in the lack of comprehension that marked my teacher's eventual response to me.

As a four-year-old looking to adults, as a new immigrant in a foreign host culture, as an obedient daughter devoted to family teachings, it was my parents and my teacher who exercised authority over me and my life; by virtue of my trust in them, I recognized the power of their authority. In a situation where the presence of more than one clear authority invited conflict between what was expected of me, I saw myself as lacking the authority to determine which teachings to practice in order to secure the virtue desired. In the absence of the answer I needed, I found myself in a crisis of agency. In the absence of a clear authoritative priority, neither clarity nor desire, however intense, over came the crisis of agency I faced – so I failed to fulfill the virtue of obedience

If confusion over what constituted the more virtuous and appropriate choice

introduced paralyzing ambiguity, then the possibility that the source of authority lacked understanding was no less disorienting. My teacher's response revealed she had not grasped my predicament. What she diagnosed to be a mere lack of knowledge was actually an overabundance of knowledge and multiple clarities. Through my four-year old eyes, her response, while that of an authority, did not answer my puzzlement over how to discern the more appropriate of the two cultural protocols. That she did not grasp the crux of the dilemma undermined how authoritative her response could be, and my own expectations that an external authority would resolve the confusion for me, proved ultimately disempowering. It is significant that an abundance of clarity (about the potential courses of action available to me) and virtuous desire (longing to do the right thing) ironically converged in the situation to further, rather than alleviate, a paralysis of choice.

This experience of failed authority was not only disorienting, it was distressing. It precipitated a crisis of authority sufficient to begin to re-orienting my discernment to establish where the authority was in each of my relationships. I wanted to understand which relationships were the most authoritative to me. As an immigrant, I would encounter more such experiences of conflicted and competing authorities, and in a variety of ways, they began to cultivate in me an awareness of how limited, vulnerable, and ultimately finite the nature of knowledge and external authorities could be. Experiences of ambiguity and ambivalence in my context of cultural hybrid would continual. They would challenge my otherwise comfortable and steadfast reliance on trusted external authorities. And as a result, my own judgments about the authorities I invested with trust were continually confronted, challenging the foundations of my self-understanding and the perceived reliability of those authoritative norms I was taught to invest my sense of self and virtue in.

Time and again, I would discover: desire to do the right thing often proved

inadequate to offer concrete guidance on which virtue to prioritize in situations where more than one right way to act or virtuous choice was evident. Pointing beyond the problem of clarity introduced by the knowledge of multiple cultural expectations and paths of virtue, an examination of experiences of desire in cultural hybridity not only exposes the penultimate nature of knowledge and clarity, but reveals the inadequacy of obedience for securing virtue.⁸

Beyond Desire for Virtue

In hindsight, something other than the clarity Ms. Arnup offered about what I should do “the next time” generated relief in me, when all was said and done that day. When my mother came to pick me up on that first day of kindergarten, it occurred to me that my teacher would disclose the news of my accident. Fearful of my mother’s disapproval, I anxiously watched them converse, looking for clues in their faces, voice tone, and body language to learn what my fate would be. I saw my teacher somehow soothe my mother’s embarrassment as they talked. Did she talk about my being new to the classroom rules, or being still young enough to have accidents? Did she chalk my accident up to some

⁸ Indeed, examining how desire evolves through experiences of ambiguity and ambivalence in cultural hybridity, it becomes evident that the path capable of overcoming the paralysis of clarity, while answering the invitation of desire, involves nothing short of relinquishing our dependence upon lesser authoritative and authorized voices. And instead, encountering the empowering call: to be responsible for the virtue of birthing one’s own authority.

forgivable proclivity common to new kids in school, or some expression of developmental destiny natural to learning kindergarteners? I will never know.

I suspect that my new teacher exercised some serious pedagogical mastery because my mother did not respond to me by making me conscious of any obligatory shame. Somehow, my accident was not been deemed a matter of personal failing, because my mother did not even scold me. I find it very significant that my concluding memory of the matter involves the recollection of sheer relief that I was not in trouble with my mom. More important than knowing the answer for what to do next time, I was happy that neither my teacher nor my mother seemed upset with me, and that – in my childlike simplicity – was all that mattered.

In all this, as much as the vulnerable reconstructions of memory will allow, I am now aware that my four-year old fears about not doing the right thing actually overshadow *another* desire present in the situation. Upstaged, or perhaps just sheltered, in the shadow of the greater drama of cultural confusion at play, this quieter desire becomes apparent to me now these decades later -- an awareness cultivated through this exercise of theological attentiveness to desire. A better understanding comes in revisiting photographs from my family's goodbye at Kimpo Airport in Korea. In that photo, my 3-year-old self hangs back peering at my brother while leaning against my mother's legs. I am watching my brother sing, his mouth wide open, with gusto. Self-awareness seems absent as I am photographed in mesmerized state, not wanting to miss a moment of my much-admired older brother's performance.

It is only now, having watched my two young sons grow through childhood, that I recognize something familiar in how I am hanging back, clinging to my mom while watching my big brother. I am reminded of something my youngest son, Ethan, would do: the times

when he would hold on me, or cling to my legs, in a similar fashion. On such occasions, though clearly hanging back and shy to engage, it was apparent that Ethan was far from disinterested in what was going on around us. I grew aware at some point that, while holding onto me, my youngest son was very keenly observing the world around him, and more often than not, his particular focus was the actions of his much-adored older brother. Repeatedly experiencing such moments with Ethan in his pre-school years, I became aware of a profound longing present in my littlest son. Ethan's observations of his big brother were so keen both because he admired Enoch and because he wanted to learn how to relate to this fascinating-yet-intimidating world he found himself in as readily and ably as his older brother appeared to.

All at once, what had been unconscious for so many years emerges – a gift of awareness possible only through having watched my two sons and their experiences as young boys. At three and four, my youngest son was never more content than when he could just watch his older brother. Settled in my lap, or snuggling in my arms, Ethan was glad to watch my oldest son (“my favorite brother, Enoch,” as Ethan referred to him) play with toys, engage in activities, or interact with others. Ethan would persistently point out what Enoch was doing, highlighting what he found particularly interesting, inviting or rather, insisting, that I notice too. Only having secured my attention as desired would Ethan would grow content. Then he often just returned to cheering on his older brother - pride and loyalty fully apparent.

From age five and beyond, or perhaps even earlier than that, I saw Ethan's contented mode of observation transitioned into the more active pursuit of imitation. It seemed Ethan desired to own in himself the ability to do and be what he had previously observed and come to value as through admiring witness of his brother. Imitating Enoch in

taste, Ethan favored the toys he saw Enoch favoring, chose foods for himself that he learned Enoch favored. No less, in what he attempted to accomplish – whether collecting Thomas the Tank Engine trains, or climbing on playground apparatus, or summer camp activities -- Ethan favored pursuing what he saw being valued as accomplishment by his older brother.

Revisiting the photo of me at Kimpo Airport, I now connect with my three-year-old self in the recognition that I may well have been doing what I saw my youngest son so often doing at three. Clinging to the security of my mother's leg, I watch my older brother sing with devotion, and a growing reverence that gives importance to what he is doing. I believe, too, that watching my older brother addressed a desire very important at three: I wanted to know how to do what he was doing. I suspect that like Ethan I, too, wanted to recreate the comfort and ease with which it must have appeared that my brother was experiencing those wonder-worthy moments I watched him in. Like countless younger siblings, I simply wanted to learn, to imitate, to experience for myself, the comfortable success my big brother seemed to create in relating to the world. However compelling and confounding, I ultimately desire to thrive in relationship with my world. I am aware of this quieter desire marking even my earliest wrestlings with a culturally hybrid existence.

Hindsight now affords me the discernment that my desire to do the right thing actually points beyond virtue – whether the virtue of truth (what is clarity if not truth?) and obedience (the desire for what is made clear to be truth). The desire to do the right thing is a symbol that represents my longing to secure the certainty that I am in right relationship with my world, that I belong, and that I am accepted as belonging. By fulfilling the requirements set forth as approved by authorities, my hope as a child and beyond was to establish some assurance that I belonged.

No wonder I was not gratified by mere knowledge of what the expectations of virtue

were, nor contented to fulfill one virtue at the cost of another. In seeking to obey, the practice of learning what the expectations of virtue was intended to secure for me a sense of belonging. I wanted to behave in a way that secured for me the approval mediated by fulfilling valued behavior. In short, by seeking virtue, I sought nothing less than to know myself as worthy of being valued. Through virtue, I wanted to know myself as beloved. In hindsight, my decision to study theology was an extension of that desire. As I sought to understand how to be in relationship with myself and with the world I knew, I did so from the Christian faith perspective that raised me to be in the service of others. Shaped by the inheritance of a faith conviction that implicitly anticipated the truth of blessedness would be revealed, not in spite of, but embedded in the experiences of our lives, I wanted to know how such struggles within the condition of cultural hybridity mediated an awareness of blessing.⁹

⁹ When I encountered Friedrich Schleiermacher early in my doctoral studies, the phenomenological discernment of Schleiermacher's analysis of our created existence was theologically compelling. He implicitly complemented the feminist theological challenge to discern (through attentiveness to our particular creaturely experiences), the Christian hope of our utter belovedness in God embedded in the limited knowing accessible to us through our embodied experiences. What particularly intrigued me was Schleiermacher's suggestion that human existence was imbued with an "original perfection." As he described the nature of creation, he insisted that God's gracious design imbued everything in our existence with the capacity to mediate the truth of our belovedness. This conviction, that our existence in creation is perfectly structured to communicate that "immediate God-consciousness" that enlivens our hope, became the ontological foundation for my theological reflections. It was in part because Schleiermacher's conviction echoed the hope of Romans 8: 38-39.

If indeed nothing in our lived experience could separate us from the love of God, then even our most distressing, disorienting, debilitating struggles with cultural hybridity could be recognized as participating in that structure of creation invested with the capacity to mediate "immediate God-consciousness." I found myself wondering: did any of the confusion generated by cultural hybridity encapsulate the great beauty and dignity of God's creative genius? How, if indeed they could, did our experiences of cultural hybridity compel the empathy of God? I focused my initial theological reflections on whether and what kind of virtue could be discerned as emerging from within contexts of cultural hybridity. The most basic trust in providence of God's gracious and loving design seemed to suggest that it

was entirely possible for experiences of cultural hybridity to cultivate and manifest particular virtues appropriate to the context, and in doing so, mediating the truth of our belovedness. Meditatively, what compelled my attention were the kinds of desires that could be discerned through those same experiences. Invited to another level of attention, the particular experiences of cultural hybridity that compelled my desire became the unintentional focus of an opened attentiveness.

Chapter Three
Eros for Existential Integrity:
A Theological Analysis of Desire in Cultural Hybridity

Cultural Hybridity: A Human Condition

Cultural hybridity, as an expression of human existence, makes manifest the reality that our identities are often influenced by a multiplicity of sources.¹⁰ Representing the convergence of different and often competing cultural values, expectations and practices, experiences of cultural hybridity are often characterized by a perplexing ambiguity and a troubling ambivalence. As liminal experiences, ambiguity and ambivalence are generated through hybrid struggles to discern what constitutes virtue, or the good. The experiences of ambiguity and ambivalence are effective for stimulating desires to experience clarity and certainty. However, as these desires are frustrated by the finite structure of the reality we inhabit, they become oriented by anxiety and fear in an idolatrous search for preemptive clarity and other false securing. An overarching desire for existential integrity becomes distorted in these efforts.

As a population created through processes of immigration, Asian North Americans are in the throes of what postcolonial theorists aptly call a “hybrid” existence “pregnant with

¹⁰ Concerned with examining the theological significance of inhabiting a culturally hybrid existence, I am not attempting a comprehensive examination of Asian North American experiences of cultural hybridity, nor offering a general survey of theories of hybridity, either contemporary or historical. Rather, in laying out a description of the liminality experienced by Asian North Americans around cultural hybridity, I seek here to develop an ontological foundation for the interpretation of a human experience. Focusing on ambiguity and ambivalence as two fundamental dynamics manifest in hybridity, I suggest that these shape the desire of hybrids in a particular way that illumines not only the nature of our human condition, but also reveals a source of redemptive potential embedded within our human condition.

... new world views” that reconstruct or, as I prefer it, *re-speak*,¹¹ our understanding of reality. This capacity to *re-speak*, and thus reframe, those conditions significant to our reality emerges as the colliding fusion of cultural realities inhabited by hybrids generates new forms of existence. These forms of existence in turn introduce new perceptions that embody a potential to empower the reconstruction of alternative social-linguistic realities.¹²

Transitional Personhood

Supporting the development of conceptual vocabulary that articulates the nuanced complexities of our hybrid identities and enables increasing aspects of our reality to be discussed, *transitional Personhood* is offered in this project as one possibility. In this work, *transitional personhood* names the reality of the fluid and dynamic self-understandings that emerge as multiple, often-competing cultural value systems are navigated. *Transitional personhood* speaks of particular self-understandings that are continually evolving in response to internal and external stimulants, and manifest in concrete situations as expressions of ourselves.

Personhood refers to particular self-understandings that express with specificity the

¹¹ By introducing the term *re-speak*, I make reference to the divine activity modeled in Genesis that empowers new realities into existence through the invitation of spoken word. The work of constructive theologies such as this project represents one approach to *re-speaking* new realities.

¹² According to Mikhail Bakhtin, “The hybrid...is not only double-voiced and double-accented...but is also double-linguaged; for in [the hybrid] there are not only... two individual consciousnesses, two voices, two accents, as there are social-linguistic consciousnesses, two epochs that come together and consciously fight it out in the territory of the utterance...It is the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms...such unconscious hybrids have at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new "internal forms" for perceiving the world in words...” From paged 360 in “Discourse in the Novel,” *The Dialogic Imagination*, as cited in *Double Gesture on the Cross: Towards a Korean American Christology* of Jeong, Joh, 5.

interior relationship we have with various aspects of ourselves as we respond to concrete contexts.¹³ *Transitional* refers to the reality that these personhoods are persistently under construction and continually renegotiated in response to ongoing changes in our interiors and the exterior concerns of our contexts. *Transitional personhood* expresses the hybrid “disposition” to integrate the multiple “roots and routes,” of our self-understandings.¹⁴

However, while the term *transitional personhood* highlights the provisional quality of hybridized self-knowledge, it is important to clarify that it does *not* suggest that there is an absence of particular content or concreteness to hybrid self-understandings.¹⁵ Yet rather than emphasizing how, when and why a particular self-understanding comes into play for a specific situation or context, transitional personhood offers the discernment that hybrid self-understandings are continually undergoing re-negotiation. Subject to the competing demands of multiple sources of identity, *transitional personhood* posit that hybrid self-understandings are particularly vulnerable to a persistent ambiguity and enduring ambivalence introduced by the confluence of interpenetrating Asian North American perspectives on norms, values, and practices.

¹³ *Personhood* is conceptualized in contrast to universalizing generalizations or strategic essentialisms, i.e. “Asian North American,” that are intentionally vague in content, being primarily concerned with identifying the commonalities under which a population can be gathered together (usually for the purposes of political advocacy or, as in this case, theoretical advancement).

¹⁴ Wonhee Anne Joh, “*Other-wise* Searching for Rutabagas: Im/positioning Korean American Feminist Politics of Roots/Routes.” APARRI conference presentation for panel session: “*A Fuller Humanity: Reshaping the Intersection of Gender, Conflict, and Faith.*” Stebbens Lounge, Women's Faculty Club, Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, CA. August 2003.

¹⁵ The use of “provisional” does not suggest that the self-knowledge involved lacks content. Indeed, *transitional* is not intended to connote that the content of one’s self-understanding/personhood is in anyway without concrete, significant, meaningful and specific content

Ambiguity

Shaped by persistent vagueness and confusion, and compounded by continually undulating boundaries, ambiguity characterizes a vulnerability fundamentally exposed when too many viable expressions of cultural identity become manifest in the conflict of cultural hybridity. As described in the previous narrative about my kindergarten experience, it is the fertility of discovering that cultural hybridity introduces multiple expressions of personhood substantively authentic to one's self-understanding, and being torn with uncertainty over how to discern which priorities are more organic and most appropriate to a particular context, that mandates such a flexibility in self-understanding.

This importance of this potential creativity in cultural hybrid identities is embraced with considerable variety among scholars and theologians. While sociologists like Mikhail Bakhtin might have us celebrate the power of such an identity to introduce new sociolinguistic realities, the testimony of contemporary Korean American theologians such as pioneer Sang Hyun Lee frequently give voice to the oppressive reality of racism in the United States that denies the potentially "playful" *liminality* of such culturally hybrid Korean American identities. As the first theologian in the United States to conceptualize the nature of marginality experienced by Korean Americans, Lee refuses to romanticize the struggles of his community, asserting that the sheer physicality of ethnic appearance that prevents many immigrants from readily assimilating into mainstream society forces minorities like Korean Americans into a situation of *coerced marginality*. Lee refutes the oppressive claims of a racist mainstream anthropology and conceptualizes a theology of vocation calling Korean American Christians to recognize that theirs is a pilgrimage of faith, * insert quote from Lee here *

Korean American feminist theologian Anne Won-Hee Joh engages post-colonial

critiques to expose colonial anthropologies that associate cultural hybridity with the flaw of cultural impurity, and mixed cultural identities with unredeemable imperfection. In such constructions, the core problem for hybrids is identifiable with a lack of clarity or the absence of a stable identity. Joh notes that some Asian North American theorists locate the primary desire generated by a hybrid context to be a longing for clarity about the “roots and routes” of one’s self-understanding.¹⁶ Persistently, such perspectives retain a conviction that hybrid vulnerability to ambiguity expresses itself through the desire for a stable, enduring self-understanding presumptively secured by identifying the “true” or dominant cultural source of one’s identity. Yet the insights offered by hybrid experiences of transitional personhood suggest, as does Joh’s work, that such a desire is ontologically problematic: that what a hybrid existence uncovers so organically is how utterly and necessarily temporary such clarities remain.

Ambivalence

Like ambiguity, ambivalence is another anxiety of finitude, and no less subject to the ontological conditions of the hybrid’s existence. However, the particular condition that precipitates the anxiety of ambivalences is by no means unique to the hybrid. It has been argued that mortality is the most definitive feature of human existence. The value of naming this ontological insight here is to remind us that, whatever else hybridity may be, it occurs – with *all* other expressions of human experience – in a context of finitude. The term finitude is used here theologically to describe a perduring feature of ontology that imposes limitations

¹⁶ Using the work of French feminist, Julia Kristeva, Joh herself introduces the transformative possibilities of a Korean description of a relational experience, jeong, for articulating a Christological understanding of redemptive relationality.

on human existence.¹⁷ Understood thus, *transitional personhood* emerges as a powerful dynamic of existence, not only generated by ambiguity, but capable of creating desired forms of existence with, and even through, ambivalence.

An understanding of the nature of ambiguity and ambivalence in cultural hybridity makes it clear that if *transitional personhood* is imbued with such power, it is a direct consequence of the freedom and finitude structuring our existence as human beings. Finitude thus structures how the concrete nature of existence will be expressed as particulars. Finitude determines that every expression of being that is manifested participates in a specific historical context, is shaped by particular political and economic conditions, expresses a original physical embodiment, inherits a unique cultural inheritance as interpreted by family members socialized into local communities of meaning, etc.¹⁸ It is a precise and original genetic code that gives rise to how my generally Asian, yet typically Korean, features of black hair, brown eyes, and “golden” skin will ultimately emerge. My birth merged two distinct genealogies, to produce a third original genealogy that both extends and ends the influence of the lineage of my two parents - and all this before the transformative socio-cultural experience of immigration to Canada. My existence highlights

¹⁷ Edward Farley, *Good and Evil*.

¹⁸ In the context of being a Korean North American woman studying theology, my family’s Korean heritage predisposes me to speak Korean. But the historical period of my coming to join my family, coincided with a time in Korea’s history when immigration to Canada was a rare but possible opportunity; therefore, the specific history of my family’s history dictates that our immigration to Canada determined that English (and infrequently French) would supplement Korean, as my primary languages for communication. My father’s particular incarnation as Korean is shaped with equal concreteness by the window of history open at the time of his birth. In the 1930’s there was a substantial population of Koreans who had migrated for to the city of Young Jong, in the part of China formerly known as Manchuria. Born to Koreans living in Manchuria, before eventually fleeing to Seoul, my father grew up during Japan’s annexation of Korea so that his “Korean-ness” distinctly expresses the ability to speak Mandarin and Japanese as a reflection of the specific political events that shaped Korean social realities.

how the legacy of concrete historical, political, economical, cultural, personal experiences that I inherit from my parents' lives continues to profoundly inform the feature of my existence, even without my having ever immediately experienced them.

Were it not for the finitude structuring all existence, there might be no cause to modify the simple formula: where two or more different sources of cultural information converge, the resulting sum expresses the total of all contributions manifest in a manner that neither diminishes each, nor disrupts the other. But introduced as a necessary condition of existence by the fact of plurality and the very multiplicity of beings that constitute existence, finitude emerges as the complexifying wrench thrown into the mechanism of a simpler existence. Cultural hybridity testifies that ours is a condition replete with manifold possibilities for manifesting that which is wholly good and distinctively beautiful. And confronted by this truth -- of the multiplicity of *tov*, as the manifold expressions of goodness and beauty potent through us, cultural hybridity also reveals how Divine *Eros* thrives in continually generating greater abundance of *tov*.

Just as it is possible to recognize how plurality generates the conflict of competition in Creation, examining experiences of desire in cultural hybridity reveals with particular lucidity how conflicts invariably arise from the competition between multiple expressions of *tov* that must vie for fulfillment and realization. Thus, rather than pointing to a paucity or lack of *tov* in existence, our examination of ambiguity and ambivalence in culturally hybrid contexts reveal that a dimension of travail and tragedy is, ironically, introduced into human existence through an abundance of that which is good: the plurality of *tov*. Indeed, significant struggle and suffering is generated as the multiplicity of *tov* organic to a context of cultural hybridity cultivate the very conditions for competition, and therefore, conflict between *tov*.

Finally, finitude emerges as both a cause and effect of suffering in the context of *benevolent creation*. Finitude, as a condition of the freedom structuring all existence, causes the struggle of competition between any multiplicity of *tov* by limitations it imposes; no less, finitude is experienced as a suffering of *tov* that accompanies the gracious hospitality of freedom structuring *benevolent creation* helps facilitate competition. Therefore, while ambiguities can and are temporarily assuaged in contexts of cultural hybridity, revisiting our understanding of *transitional personhood* helps show how cultural hybrids endure on-going ambivalence, struggling with doubts even having discerned clearly which particular expressions of cultural personhood were appropriate in a particular context of engagement. The realization that the whole of one's self-understanding cannot be accommodated in any single manifestation of personhood develops this anxiety into an ambivalence that persistently troubles the core of hybrid ambiguity. In other words, as the hybrid seeks to alleviate the confusion of ambiguity through choices, any choice made, by definition of being a choice, eliminates other potential choices. Thus, the "choices" here are in fact decisions that manifest some aspects of one's being, though only through the loss of other aspects that are possibly as integral and important to one's self-understanding as the ones manifest, even while they may not be immediately relevant or appropriate to the context. The uncomfortable anxiety involved in being unable to inhabit all aspects of one's being simultaneously generates ambivalence in the hybrid – even despite the comfort gained by securing a temporary clarity through expressing the truth of an aspect of one's self in existential concreteness. Ambivalence only deepens with the realization that any manifestation of self-expression necessarily enacts a disavowal of other meaningful self-expressions; this is because, regardless of which manifestation of personhood is expressed, every decision to express one aspect of personhood necessarily involves disavowing, even if

only temporarily, other valid, meaningful and significant possibilities of existence. There is no single manifestation of personhood that can incorporate the whole of a person's self-understanding, any more than a single moment in time can capture all the transitional developments in self-understanding that continually emerge through a life-time of self-evolution.

Explored through the nature of finitude, ambivalence emerges as an anxiety of a different order than ambiguity. While ambiguity is continually addressed through ongoing decisions to manifest different aspects of one's self in response to particular settings, the clarity wrought of such choices nevertheless fails to quell the anxiety of ambivalence. As a point of fact, clarity cannot offer a solution for ambivalence because it becomes the very occasion when ambivalence is most poignantly experienced: choices that clarify necessarily involve the unsettling disavowal of other dimensions of one's self.¹⁹

Finitude limits who we can or cannot be in any given situation: finitude structures or agency so that we cannot manifest all of who we are, simultaneously, in a particular

¹⁹ On the development of my understanding of the nature and effects of ambivalence in cultural hybridity, my committee offered exceptional assistance. Don E. Saliers first offered the discernment that *a dynamic of disavowal* poignantly deepens the troubling experience of ambivalence during an exceptional dissertation consultation in the spring of 2005. While discussing transitional personhood and the particular nature of vulnerabilities generated by finitude in cultural hybridity, I lamented that even while the good of clarity was temporarily achieved, the same choices that alleviated the problem of ambiguity simultaneously became the very decisions that closed off the possibility of other potential self-expressions. Having named the loss of inadvertent disavowal to describe distress in ambivalence, Don Saliers offered the clarify that finitude prevented the possibility of a reprieve for ambivalence, to which Dianne Stewart commented that this particular description of ambivalence, was an experience recognizable to any person struggling with competing identities and desire for wholeness, cultural or otherwise. Connecting to Dianne Stewart's comment, Wendy Farley asked the question: what it might mean for an understanding of desire in cultural hybridity if, even the most appropriate and virtuous choices expressing personhood in cultural hybridity failed to secure the goodness of potential expressions? The compelling insights and questions that emerged through that consultation mark this work indelibly.

context.²⁰ In finitude, to express one aspect of personhood eventually occasions that one cannot express other aspects of one's being. Given the multitudinous possibilities of existence introduced by a hybrid context, ambivalence expresses an uncertainty or insecurity about the sufficiency of (any) one particular manifestation to represent the whole truth of our selves in the whole complexity of our Asian North American existence. In this concern, the hybrid's desire for existential integrity is born.

A Desire for Existential Integrity

The creative point of this insight – that integrity acts as a counterpoint to clarity in a conceptualization of hybrid desire -- is carried over from this analysis of hybridity to the following theological reflection and interpretation of Genesis 3. This project moves forward on the premise that, upon closer examination, this initial desire for clarity reveals yet a deeper, more primordial longing, for experiences of existential integrity in the face of ambivalence. Indeed, while the desire for existential integrity initially expresses discomfort at inhabiting a reality that does not permit the continual manifestation of all dimensions of our existence, I suggest this desire for integrity – when understood through experiences of beauty – can alternatively be conceptualized as longing to embody forms of existence most appropriate to one's being.

It is the presence of too many viable options in the absence of a single meta-identity

²⁰ According to Edward Farley, finitude renders our desire vulnerable to idolatrous practices of “false securing.” In false securing, our desire lights upon those [penultimate] goods available in finitude, distorting the proper use in hopes of securing what we desire. But our disappointment with the goods we find in finitude helps us discover that our desires are oriented to a good beyond that which we can obtain. Though not within the parameters of this work to lay out, in another work, I appropriate Edward Farley's analysis for our context of cultural hybridity and argue that 1) seeking *preemptive clarity* manifests as an idolatrous securing against the fears generated by ambiguity, and 2) *premature closure* functions similarly to secure us against the doubts inherent in ambivalence.

that offers enduring existential integrity and a context limited by finitude that introduces anxiety about inhabiting a form of being that is inappropriate, unfulfilling, or otherwise inauthentic to one's self. This is the persistent awareness troubling the core of hybrid ambiguity that is conceptualized, for the purpose of this work, as humanity's central problematic: the possibility (inescapability) of inauthentic existence or the elusiveness of existential integrity. For this reason, truth-in-existence becomes an important concept for this project. I use truth-in-existence – an appropriation of Heidegger's "truth-in-being," – to conceptualize a form of existence (possibly the only one) that has the capacity to address the primordial desire in human beings to inhabit an existence consonant with the character of our souls. In this way, truth-in-existence functions as an idea in the tradition of a Platonic *eidos* – devoid of specific content, but, nevertheless, recognizably imbued in every manifestation of hybrid existence expressive of existential integrity of authentic being or an existence authentic to one's nature.

Aletheia: Truth-in-Existence

This truth-in-existence is an expression of (hybrid) being characterized by two main features. The first is an orientation to embody with integrity attunement to the nature of human existence as revealed through experiences of hybridity to the soul – knowledge discerned through the assistance of one's deepest passions, emotions, and affections.²¹ The second is that it represents an actual embodiment of this awareness lived out in the practice

²¹ "The deepest things we know are found in the form of defining passions. This is what might be called a determinate attunement to the world." Don E. Saliers, "Beauty & Terror" (CITE)

of one's existence – as opposed to remaining inert as merely an understanding akin to propositional knowledge that is not yet actualized (regardless of how rich in detail or perception). As such, truth-in-existence is not an ought or a should, but an “is.” In this latter sense, the term echoes Heidegger's notion of truth-in-being as it speaks of the nature of truth being primarily an enacted reality, so rather than conceptual accuracy, truth is a practice of existence.²²

Such a non-propositional understanding of truth offers liberating insight when attempting to conceptualize the problem of ambiguity, and offers exceptional potential for pointing out the direction of new responses to the pain of ambiguity. Consider how notions of truth-in-existence change with truth being moved out of the domain of thought into the realm of act and experience. Traditionally, for hybrids struggling to verbalize the configuration of cultural understanding/identity/hybridity that speaks accurately of their particular identity, we often find ourselves without the socio-linguistic categories that could speak to the complexity of our hybrid reality.²³ The criteria of truth-in-being,

²² Briefly, my concept draws upon the nature of truth presented in the thought of Martin Heidegger, in “An Essay on The Essence of Truth,” in Basic Works. Rejecting popular notions of truth as a propositional correlation between fact and statement modeled after the scientific method, Heidegger seeks out the earliest configurations of truth as correlation. In doing so, he discovers that Christian theologians who conceptualized truth in this way were attempting to capture the transformation of humanity as we come to embody the imago dei in which we are created. This dynamic of potential becoming embodied as actual – of ideal being manifest in form – becomes the cornerstone in Heidegger's new understanding of truth as that dynamic which transpires when reality becomes concrete through experience. What transpires when potential becomes actual, when ideal takes shape? In essence, experience meets reality, and, in his conceptualization of truth as a dynamic of disclosure and concealment, Heidegger appears to have recovered Platonic nuances that shape truth conceptually as a power or energy able to compel into existence a form of being authentic to a particular entity, what he otherwise calls “truth-in-being.”

²³ In the past, Korean American theologians and ministers have collaborated on efforts to bring clarity to the confusion of a culturally hybrid identity through discussions that engage a critical use of such numeric terms as, “1.5,” or “1.7” or “2nd” generation,

propositionally defined, were only met when one could find the language to describe how our identity was experienced.²⁴ Where the language did not exist, the “truth” of one’s identity could not be ascertained.

On the other hand, with truth moved into the realm of act, lived experience is permitted to become that space in which truth can be manifest. Thus understood, the “truth” of one’s being is not vulnerable to the inconsistencies of description so much as enacted. Establishing an ontological basis for truth, Heideggerian *aletheia* protects truth against the pitfalls of mere speech. Indeed, given the freedom offered through embodiment, an “authentic” existence or the truth of one’s being did not need to be described with accuracy, so much as lived into consciousness. As something made fact through existing, truth as a process of becoming-through-being liberates a hybrid, not so much from the ambiguity of existence, but from the inability to speak the complexity that is her truth. Truth, as the power-to-be, offers a hybrid the freedom to act specifically in accordance with what one knows to be most appropriate in a concrete and particular moment, and offers the temporary comfort of knowing in that embodiment (disclosure) or rejection/refusal (concealment) of a particular existence, the hybrid nonetheless expresses her truth-in-being.²⁵

offering the thoughtful logic behind choices that seemed to best represent the unique blend of cultural assimilation and resistance of the particular population being discussed. Marion Park and Sang Hyun Lee, “article” in *Korean American Ministry: A Resource Book*. Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), 1987.

²⁴ For example, in response to a casual inquiry about my cultural identity, “so, what are you?” if the questioner was not satisfied with the generalized “Korean Canadian” response, my next “truest” answer based on a propositional understanding of truth might have to be something more particular along the lines of: “sometimes more Korean, sometimes more Canadian, most of the time: confused about what that makes me?”

²⁵ As opposed to having to name a generalized essence, i.e. Korean Canadian, or Asian North American, that, by its very definition, could not speak of distinctiveness.

You arrive at enough certainty to be able to make your way,
but it is making it in darkness.

Don't expect faith to clear things up for you.

It is trust, not certainty.

- Flannery O' Connor

Chapter 4

Born of Divine *Eros*:

A Benevolent Creation, Contemplative Eros, and Erotic faithfulness

This chapter offers a conceptual bridge between the prior theological analysis of ambiguity and ambivalence in cultural hybridity, and the subsequent interpretation of Genesis 3 as a narrative depicting humanity's faithfulness. The theological paradigms conceptualized here become the interpretive lens that renders the alchemy of Divine *Eros* visible as it works through the hospitality of a *benevolent creation* to inspire the *tov* of human desire and empower an integrity of intention capable of cultivating *erotic faithfulness*.

Divine Eros: A Symbol of Divine Power

Contemporary North American theologian Wendy Farley develops *eros* as a symbol descriptive of divine power. Farley's work on divine *eros* responds to traditional philosophical and theological arguments that insist the nature of divine perfection is idealized as desireless, self-sufficient unity. While acknowledging that such formulations of divine perfection "protect divine being from emotional or ontological entanglements with creation...[and preserve] the majesty and integrity of transcendent divinity," Farley nevertheless finds the correlative metaphysical implications theologically troubling. If "self-enclosed identity is the ideal of perfection," then what logically follows is the suggestion that "difference and relationship diminish perfection."²⁶ Indeed, where undifferentiated unity

²⁶ Wendy Farley further laments the dichotomy established when "the goodness of ultimate reality" is pitted "in direct opposition to the perfection of creation," such that there emerges a "radical disjunction between the perfection of God and the striving for perfection in human beings." She recognizes this fundamentally undermines the efficacy of analogies attempting to establish a logically consistent and viable description of how God and the world, despite being essentially different, can be said to be relationally involved, whether as

and solipsistic contemplation represent divine perfection, the presence of Creation – as a structure of existence differentiated from the divine – introduces correlative philosophical problems that include formulating how monadic divine perfection would relate to that which is not identical with itself.

Farley rightly resists such an ideal of divine perfection because it pits “the goodness of ultimate reality...in direct opposition to the perfection of creation,” and ultimately generates such a “radical disjunction between the perfection of God and the striving for perfection in human beings” as to undermine the efficacy of any analogical effort to establish a logically consistent and theologically viable conception of how God and the world (despite being essentially different) can be said to be relationally involved -- whether as Creator and Created, or Redeemer and Redeemed.²⁷ Framing both her discontent with, and her solution for, this theological problem Farley reasons, “if God is said to be causally connected to human beings as the power of creation and redemption, and if both creation and redemption are constituted by relationship, *then a relational symbol for divine perfection may be more appropriate.*”²⁸

Divine *Eros* is the symbol for divine power that Farley introduces as most suitable for overcoming this problematic disconnect between the existence of Creation, and its Source. In clarifying that *eros* is a symbol for divine power, Farley avoids associating *eros* with the unknowable emotional life of the divine, and offers *eros* as descriptive of the energy of divine creativity. For Farley, *eros* emerges as a dynamic process of divine self-expression -- a powerful creativity capable of overcoming isolation by calling the alterity of Creation into

Creator and Created, or Redeemer and Redeemed. Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 104-105.

²⁷ Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 105.

²⁸ Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 105, italics mine.

existence.

Divine Eros and Creation: Creating Other for Relationship

Farley's development of Divine *Eros* fundamentally reframes traditional philosophical and Christian theological understandings of the nature of divine perfection. Rather than the glory of an untouchable, eternally self-contemplating Creator that must, of necessity, be impervious to the existence of the Creation it sources, Divine *Eros* as a symbol of divine power reveals divine perfection to be energized as a generous sharing of existence in relationship with an Other. Theologically, Divine *Eros* empowers Farley to structure divine perfection as a relationship. This construction enables her to account for how the vast and splendid alterity of Creation connects in relationship with a differentiated Creator.

Farley's understanding of Divine *Eros* has transformative implications for her understanding of Creation. Divine *Eros* as that presence capable of empowering the dynamic of interaction as "the greater perfection of relationality" overcomes the inadequacy of isolated self-sufficiency and contributes the theological awareness that it is the wisdom of the divine love to bring the Other into existence for the purpose of relationship.

Creation's identity -- as existence differentiated from the Divine -- and its nature -- as expressing the benevolent intention of Divine *Eros* -- offers the hospitality of existence to that which is Other than God. In this way, Farley helps us see more clearly how Creation emerges as both *act* and *actor* of Divine *Eros*. Creation is not only that which is *enacted* through the energy of divine love, but -- of greater theological import for our work -- Creation's very *form* exemplifies the same benevolent structure of hospitality embodied through the radical relationality of Divine *Eros*.

By highlighting the awareness that the kind of existence Divine *Eros* generates in and

through Creation is ontologically differentiated from itself, Farley underscores the inadequacy of traditional philosophical and theological formulations that epitomize divine perfection as undifferentiated unity, and offers the theological clarity that Creation is that expression of hospitality through which Divine *Eros* welcomes the alterity of the Other into existence. Thus, this point emphasizes that Divine *Eros* rather than creating by replication, Divine *Eros* embrace alterity in existence as a virtue and value inherent to Creation.

For Farley, the crux of reframing divine perfection pivots on a singular clarity: love is expressed most essentially as relationship. In that Divine *Eros* acts to offer hospitality to that which is unlike itself, we see Creation represents the energy of Divine *Eros* manifesting the perfection of its loving nature, benevolently generating the very condition – hospitality towards the existence of an Other - needed to fulfill its nature as radically relational. The transformative energy of Divine *Eros* welcomes into existence the presence of that which is not itself. Thus Creation becomes identified, theologically, as that significant Other without which the relational nature of Divine *Eros* as loving would remain unfulfilled.

Divine Eros: Oriented by Benevolent Hospitality

As the perfection of divine loving emerges through her understanding of Creation, Farley describes Divine *Eros* as being manifest in an ecstatic – that is, outward (*ek-*) movement of – communicating of its nature. Creation models the divine acting to transcend itself. Indeed, in transcending itself to share existence with Otherness, Divine *Eros* dynamically erupts the emptiness of its solitude to graciously usher in the presence of a differentiated Other. Farley sees the loving nature of Divine *Eros* epitomized as a generative hospitality that transcends itself to share existence in, with, and through, a vast and

differentiated plurality. Through the diversity of existence manifested in Creation it becomes clear that Divine *Eros* imparts value to that which is unlike the divine. Underscoring Creation's theological identity as the Other called into existence for loving relationship with the Divine, Farley's work on Divine *Eros* empowers, rather than undermines, a prophetic valuing of differentiated plurality of Creation and affirms the necessity of benevolence towards forms of existence that are Other-than-Divine.

If Divine *Eros* is a symbol for divine power, Farley's description of Creation also helps us cultivate the further awareness that when Divine *Eros* acts – whether to share existence with that which is not itself, or to generate those conditions necessary for the fulfillment of its nature as loving -- it is oriented by a quality of *benevolent hospitality*. While *benevolent hospitality* is not a term Farley uses, it is introduced here to describe in greater detail the character of the energy of Divine *Eros* – the acting to embrace the flourishing of an existence that is Other-than-itself. Building on Farley's awareness that the erotic perfection of love is manifest through the relational hospitality of Creation, *benevolent relationality* is recognizable by its effects. Theologically, the concept names a dynamic of mutual honoring and appreciation capable of empowering the *tov* possible in partnership with an Other.

Significantly, in Farley's description of Divine *Eros* as expressing the perfection of its loving nature through Creation, the kenotic sharing of existence is not framed as diminishing the divine in any way. The divine activity of Creation not only generates an abundance of existence, such that existence is not diminished, but also brings about the fulfillment of Divine *Eros*. This clarity offers the us the vital discernment that even as the perfection of love welcomes the flourishing of the Other in Creation, there is no loss, hindrance, or diminishment of divine nature. The Divine in no way neglects the fulfillment of its own nature, nor fails to honor the thriving of its whole goodness as it extends the hospitality of

existence to Creation.

As Farley makes it clear that the divine moves wholly and fully in harmony with the *tov* of its own nature, it becomes possible to understand how the benevolence enacted by Divine *Eros* is a hospitality that does not separate out or sacrifice the good of itself in seeking partnership with the good of another. Creation as an act of hospitality welcoming the *tov* of Otherness into existence shows Divine *Eros* to be, simply, honoring the fulfillment of its nature as loving. Therefore, when we use *benevolent hospitality* to describe the energy of Divine *Eros*, it must be understood as desire shaped as an intentionality that honors the fulfillment of one's own nature in empowering the flourishing of Otherness and the *tov* of hospitable relationship with the same. Thus, *benevolent hospitality* emerges as grounded in realizing the *tov* of its own nature while oriented to relationships that promote the flourishing of Others.

Given that Creation is declared (seven times) to be wholly or perfectly *tov* at its inception, we presume this quality of *benevolent hospitality* shapes Creation and mediates all relationships therein. Furthermore, examining Creation through the lens of *benevolent hospitality* cultivates our awareness of the profound interdependence structuring the *tov* throughout Creation. Here the term *benevolent creation* is introduced to describe the experience of an existence imprinted by the awareness that the same *benevolent hospitality* which birthed Creation graciously persists in the ontological structure of existence, oriented to the flourishing and fulfillment of all the varieties of *tov* introduced through Creation. Conceptualized thus, *benevolent creation* recognizes that Divine *Eros* wisely structures all the *tov* sharing existence, including its own, with and through a necessarily mutual dynamic of edification. A profound and radical interdependence structured into all existence inevitably shapes *benevolent creation* as an experience of existence in which the honoring and fulfillment

of one's own nature likewise cultivates and brings to flourishing the *tov* of an Other -- indeed, of all others -- in Creation. Conversely, the failure to honor the flourishing and fulfillment of one's own *tov* becomes occasion for the subsequent inability to offer genuine hospitality to the *tov* of an Other. Where we cannot or do not embrace the flourishing of our own *tov*, the partnerships we cultivate suffer from the inadequacy of that lack and become unable to generate the genuine hospitality of appreciation capable of energizing delighting in truth of the other's *tov*.²⁹

In this way, *benevolent creation* comes to offer an understanding of how the problem of theodicy takes shape in a context of a plurality and multiplicity of *tov*. If the divine is benevolent, and all-powerful in creating, then what accounts for experiences of pain-filled suffering, harm, and struggle in light of our experience of divine benevolence in Creation? In answer to the problem of suffering in Creation, *benevolent creation* begins and ends with the simple conviction that the nature of divine love is, and must be, perfected in the fullness of a plurality of beingness, and consequently, the *tov* of plurality inherent to Creation is structured in both finitude and freedom.

²⁹ In the absence of our ability to have our own *tov* realized, we become vulnerable to the sense of incompleteness and inadequacy associated with not experiencing the empowerment of our own *tov*. Subsequently, the prospect of the Others we are in partnership with knowing the fulfillment of their *tov*, it becomes difficult if not impossible to avoid the envy, jealousy, as well as the fear and doubt of self-inadequacy that fundamentally cripples our relational capacity to genuinely offer the hospitality of appreciation to the *tov* of others. What relationships are cultivated in this state of lack become distorted by the desire to secure what we need through the Other, or to extract it from the partnership, as if such external sources could provide what we have failed to embrace and realize for ourselves. In the absence of honoring the fulfillment of our own *tov*, what appreciation of the Other we can generate remains imprisoned to self-seeking gain. The fear and doubt generated by the experience of lacking one's *tov* deprives any partnership of genuine hospitality. Appreciation of the other's *tov* cultivates fearful envy and jealousy rather than empowering the freedom of delight that empowers us to embrace the flourishing of the Other. Troubled by the scarcity of lack, conflicted competition rather than hospitality, shapes the partnership.

Farley makes this compelling point: it is the non-coercive and non-absolutizing orientation of freedom in Divine *Eros* that generates the plurality and multiplicity of being that exists as Creation. It is freedom that empowers our existence and gives agency to the manifold possibilities of “us” as well as the existence of the vast plurality of otherness that constitutes *benevolent creation*. Yet of necessity, it is only through the conditioning of finitude’s defining limiting and boundaries, that the fullest plurality in existence can be displayed. It is by virtue of its partnership with finitude that the vast diversity in existence can be arrayed. Thus, the structure of freedom that offers hospitality to the existence of one, offers becoming to all. For this reason, freedom can be perceived as working at odds with its own creative power in *benevolent creation*: empowering the conflict of competition between all beings sharing an existence. The same freedom that creates non-coercively and without absolutizing likewise generates the structure of an inherently limiting existence that hinders any one form of existence from dominating persistently. It is the nature of freedom to continue to introduce forms of existence, eventually cultivating the condition of finitude as conflict and competition among those sharing existence. In this way, the abundance of freedom is revealed to be self-checking because as freedom empowers plurality in Creation, it introduces a dynamic of shared existence that eventually invites the diminishment of each through conflict and competition in order to cultivate the thriving and fulfillment of others.

As a context of existence that generates the plurality of *tov* revealed in the multiplicity of beings, cultural hybridity emerges as able to reveal the genius of how *benevolent creation* manifests divine perfection in its capacity for endless creativity. As an existence explicitly informed by a multiplicity of sources, each expressing a variation of *tov*, cultural hybridity well illumines how the conflicts inherent to such an existence emerge. The finitude that conditions plurality inhibits the possibility of a moment in which all the dimensions of

tov potent within our being can be embodied or expressed simultaneously. Structured by the freedom, finitude conditions the expression of every *tov* potent within *benevolent creation*.

No less, necessitated by the multitude of *tov* contributing to our self-understandings, our experiences of ambiguity and ambivalence in cultural hybridity cultivate in us a desire for the *tov* of existential integrity, an antidote to the painfully tragic experience of being unable to inhabit an existence that embodies the whole of the manifold *tov* inherent in our existence.

Thus, it is not some external source that introduces the travail of freedom and the tragedy of suffering, as we come to terms with an existence that refuses to be all fullness of all that is good and beautiful, manifest all together, all at once, simultaneously. In this way, it is revealed that with creative and existential power comes responsibility, as humanity must take account of the significance we assign each expression of the potential good and beauty in our lives in assigning what we will value more and less.

The challenges humanity faces in negotiating a compromise between conflicting paradigms are intensified as experiences of finitude continually render it difficult, if not impossible, for a harmonious integration capable of manifesting each expression of good simultaneously, or honoring all beauty equally. Indeed, in the absence of a single meta-identity capable of integrating all the dimensions of a person simultaneously, struggles to negotiate claims of competing cultural identities generate poignant and persistent anxieties about the incompleteness and inadequacy of our embodied self-understandings, raising questions of whether we are inhabiting an existence wholly appropriate to our being.

If the transformative, benevolent energy of Divine *Eros* structuring all existence with and through love is imbued with a non-absolutizing and non-coercive freedom essential to the truth of its divine nature, then no less, *benevolent creation* as that experience which

expresses the perfection divine love is structured by the same openness. This fundamental freedom organic to the perfection of love makes clear that responsibility of choice relentlessly influences our experiences of *benevolent creation*, leaving us vulnerable to that which we come to identify as evil.

In the promise of divine love mediated through a *benevolent creation*, there is no suggestion that existence is an experience free from the harm of struggle, pain, or suffering. The very nature of *benevolent creation* as emerging from the perfection of divine love refutes naïve suggestions that divine benevolence might make our existence immune to the pain of struggle, harm, or suffering.³⁰ Farley reminds us that because existence in Creation is characterized by finitude and freedom, “divine love is tragically structured.” The non-coercive nature that perfects love requires existence to remain open to the possibility of evil “by leaving freedom and the future undermined.”³¹ The openness of freedom provided for and protected by the divine benevolence must no less be hospitable to the finitude of existence, and therein, to the inevitable vulnerability of the same goodness or *tov*, it permits. Yet, Farley points out, Divine *Eros*, as a symbol of God’s power that is oriented to hospitality towards the existence and appreciation of the Other, nevertheless “retains the agency to oppose evil.”³²

My understanding of Creation’s *tov*, as laid out in *benevolent creation*, finds its strongest resonances in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s doctrine of Original Perfection. The phenomenological discernment of Schleiermacher’s analysis of human existence via his

³⁰ The complexity introduced by this freedom is most effectively conveyed in Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *The Christian Faith*, and in particular, his doctrine of the Original Perfection of the World. *The Christian Faith*. Eds H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989.

³¹ Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 98.

³² Farley, *Tragic Vision*, 98.

doctrine of the Original Perfection of the World, is theologically compelling for its insistence that the gracious design of Creation imbues everything in our existence with the capacity to stimulate our “God-consciousness.”³³ This in turn serves to awaken us to of the truth of our belovedness through an unmediated, that is “immediate” experience of union with the Divine that Schleiermacher calls, “immediate God-consciousness,” a relational awareness of unity with the vastness of existence that transcends us. s conviction that the whole of our experience of existence in Creation is “perfectly” structured – even through struggles with harm and suffering -- to communicate a hope-enlivening “immediate God-consciousness” echoes the ontological foundation of *benevolent creation*.

Like the Schleiermachian notion of immediate God-consciousness, the truth of our belovedness in Creation does not emerge *through* or *as* once-removed observation, mediated by reflection on an experience, in the way that an observation or “objective” opinion is disconnected (in a manner of speaking) from direct experience. Instead, it is an “unmediated” consciousness of being in union with all Creation that is grasped directly, through a relational consciousness like that of an “insider-participant” whose knowing comes not through an “objective” disconnectedness, but through immediacy of identification and access that reveals the significance of meanings invisible to those lacking the connection.

Such an epistemology rejects suggestions that knowledge *about* how all beings in Creation relate adequately expresses or fulfills what it means to grasp the truth of our own or any existence in Creation. The interpretive distinction implied here about the nature of truth

³³ In keeping with his understanding of religion as “the sense and taste of the Infinite.” Schleiermacher describes God-consciousness as the feeling of absolute dependence on God

should be clarified: truth is not merely the awareness that we inhabit a context of shared experience. If this were the case, knowing the truth of these relationship could satisfied by merely securing information *about* these relationships. The intuition – that knowing that suggests an immediacy of awareness -- that we are incomplete and are lacking wholeness precedes the practice of relationship that heals through the consciousness of connection. For this reason, truth in Creation is suggested to reveal desire: because truth is that which is able to heal the lack. More importantly, as *benevolent creation* asserts the relational structure of Creation clearly frames a shared existence, it is practice of relationality shaped by the intention to cultivate those connections that completes the wholeness of truth. Simply perceiving that we inhabit a shared existence is not the same as engaging in relationship with those presented to us through a shared existence. The practice of relationship, therefore, introduces the context of engagement that enables us to experience belonging. Belonging, as a metaphor for wholeness describes relationship and the awareness of connection that comes along with relationship.

This notion of truth as a desire for wholeness takes on more compelling dimensions when we modify the truth sought to be that truth of *tov* in Creation. While still understood as desire for wholeness, truth as desire for wholeness now takes on a dimension of desiring the good. Thus to know the truth of *tov* in Creation becomes a call to cultivate the relational wholeness that makes good, and the relational goodness that makes whole. *Benevolent creation* maintains that the truth of *tov* in Creation expresses a desire for relationships capable of cultivating that good that is organic to each, while inviting the fullest goodness of all. As an interpretive paradigm, *benevolent creation* does not present a new understanding of Creation, but rather illumines that attentiveness to the nature of relationships in Creation reveals a new understanding of what constitutes the truth, and the truth of Creation. Truth -- as a

relationship that brings consciousness of the relationality between all -- transforms not merely what truth reveals but, more significantly perhaps, how truth is known.

Presenting truth as a dynamic of relationality capable of making manifest that good which is organic to each form of existence/capable of honoring the good organic to existence, articulates an epistemology able to do justice to the profoundly collaborative nature of such truth. *Benevolent creation* as an interpretive paradigm affirms that the radically interdependent nature of Creation renders it impossible to know the truth of any part without an grasping its relationship to the whole, or for that matter, that no “one” entity exists apart from its relationship to a transcendent “All.” For humanity, this not only means that the truth of ourselves cannot be known apart grasping our relationships with human Others, but also requires us to grasp our connection with the communities of non-human life that structures our existence.

Liken back to Schleiermacher’s concept of the Original Perfection of the world and the reminder that *benevolent creation* is shaped as an affirmation that confirms: even experiences of struggle and conflict in existence cannot hide the truth of *benevolent hospitality* shaping Creation nor impeded the stimulation of God-consciousness that shifts our awareness to seek Divine *Eros*. While in no way suggesting that the evil experienced is not evil, but *benevolent creation* shares the Schleiermachian conviction even through the evil of suffering, harm, and struggle, “God-consciousness may develop in every state of consciousness...” such that the contrast we experience -- between the *tov* we desire and the state of lacking that *tov* (remembering that knowing evil expresses the diminishment, corruption, or lack of the *tov* we cherish) -- serves to activate an increase of God-consciousness.

Without denying that existence is free from struggle and evil, *benevolent creation*

theologically affirms a confidence in the infinity of Divine *Eros* that faithfully honors its nature as benevolent hospitality, lovingly creating provision and protection capable of empowering the fulfillment of the *tov* it welcomes into existence. For this reason, *benevolent creation* not only describes a presencing of divine hospitality but functions prescriptively, to express how the practice of hospitality towards other forms of existence (whose expressions are necessarily always concrete and specific) manifests the perfection of divine benevolence. *Benevolent creation* testifies faithfully to the paradox inherent in an understanding of divine perfection as differentiated existence: perfection and goodness reside undiminished in existence, despite becoming embodied in forms of existence utterly limited and constrained by the historicity of finitude. *Benevolent creation* offers the assurance that the efficacy of Divine *Eros* remains active and wise, even in an experience of existence structured and limited by the fragility of finitude.

As discussed in earlier chapters, cultural hybridity represents the presence of multiple *tov* in a context limited by finitude. Characterized by experiences of multiple possibilities of *tov*, and competing paths leading to virtue, our experiences of this human condition provides a unique lens for understanding human desire and what it reveals about the limits of clarity. The frustration of our desire for existential integrity in finitude exposes the inadequacy of obedience as a paradigm of human virtue. This is because the context of cultural hybridity -- expressing a situation in which multiple and competing understandings of virtue or the good converge -- generates a crisis of indecision as the good desire to do the right thing and manifest virtuous behavior becomes paralyzed by an awareness that more than one definition for how to fulfill virtue exists.

Suffering from paralyzed desire, our desire to obey – whether to be good or to do what is right and virtuous – is stymied by the limited clarity available when multiple options

present themselves simultaneously and our definitions of virtue clash. At the heart of these competing definitions may be varying cultural understandings of virtue founded on differing cultural values, but at the core of our failure to manifest the virtue of obedience, we find not a failure of desire, but a keen desire to obey frustrated by the presence of multiple understandings of what is good. Such experiences of frustrated desire reveal that it is problematic to establish obedience as the standard for confirming the truth of faithfulness, or for offering proof of the presence of virtue. The troubling presence of more than one definition of what is good wreaks havoc on simplistic notions that the good or virtue is self-evident in any situation. Experiences of finitude mediated through the condition of cultural hybridity suggest that despite our desires to the contrary, we have access to only a limited clarity about what is good or right, which introduces an ambiguity offering no distinctions that help determine *which* virtue is most appropriate or prized in any given situation.

Blessedness, Erotic Faith and Erotic faithfulness

In acknowledging that we inhabit a condition that is essentially characterized by ambiguity and ambivalence, it is the experience of our desires that both attest to a persistent lack of clarity and continually conflicting desires, and gift us with the awareness that we seek a fuller *tov* than the *tov* we may know. In such a context, we are not saved from this condition by obedience or by clarity, but by the desire for the good. Schleiermacher is helpful here, as he illumines an understanding of human beatitude or blessedness in conflict.³⁴ As expressed

³⁴ Schleiermacher's conviction echoed the ultimate of hope of my Christian faith as declared in Romans 8: 38-39 – that nothing in our experiences could function to wedge us from the intention of divine benevolence towards us, “neither height nor depth, nor things

by Julian in her conviction, “that all will be well, and all will be well, and every kind of thing will be well,”³⁵ blessedness emerges as the audacious courage of trust that stands in defiance of suggestions that anything less than the hospitality of divine benevolence is at work in our lives. Schleiermacher’s profoundly compelling understanding of benevolence suggests, theologically, that our experiences of frustration and confusion, and what hardship, suffering, and struggle are generated by conflict, nevertheless sharpen the longing of our hunger to know the truth of *benevolent hospitality* and awaken us to our identity as bearers of

past, nor things present...” If indeed nothing in our lived experience could separate us from the love of God, then even our most distressing, disorienting, debilitating struggles with cultural hybridity could be recognized as participating in that structure of creation invested with the capacity to mediate “immediate God-consciousness.” I found myself wondering: did any of the confusion generated by cultural hybridity encapsulate the great beauty and dignity of God’s creative genius? How, if indeed they could, did our experiences of cultural hybridity compel the empathy of God? I focused my initial theological reflections on whether and what kind of virtue could be discerned as emerging from within contexts of cultural hybridity. The most basic trust in providence of God’s gracious and loving design seemed to suggest that it was entirely possible for experiences of cultural hybridity to cultivate and manifest particular virtues appropriate to the context, and in doing so, mediating the truth of our belovedness. Meditatively, what compelled my attention were the kinds of desires that could be discerned through those same experiences. Invited to another level of attention, the particular experiences of cultural hybridity that compelled my desire became the unintentional focus of an opened attentiveness.

³⁵ Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, trans. Edmund Colledge, O.S.A. and James Walsh, S.J. (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 225.

the divine image.

A Theological Anthropology of Contemplative Desire

The theological anthropology that emerges from such an understanding of *blessedness* primarily affirms that humanity, as formed in God’s likeness to bear the image of God, is imbued with a profound capacity for what Farley calls, “erotic faith.” At its heart, erotic faith emerges as an orientation towards the divine. Still further developed through Farley’s analysis of contemplative *eros*, erotic faith emerges as a practice of trust oriented by the contemplative hope of union with the Divine. We draw upon her understanding of contemplative *eros* to discern a theological anthropology capable of illuminating our vocation as “God-bearers.”

As Farley describes contemplation, it is a practice of desire expressing our longing to be connected to the divine image in us:

As contemplative desire is aroused, the desire for genuine freedom from the passions intensifies. Our longing to connect to the divine image in us, to live more completely out of the “oneing” of our soul with Holy Eros, and to radiate this love to other beings becomes increasingly, painfully urgent.³⁶

This description of contemplative desire as a painful urgency to inhabit an existence that is more “oned” with ourselves—intended by the One who created us to need such connection—resonates with the description of the desire for existential integrity that emerges through our earlier theological analysis of cultural hybridity. Farley’s analysis illumines that when desire for existential integrity is examined through a contemplative lens,

³⁶ Wendy Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth: the Wounding and Healing of Desire*, p. 119.

the experience of cultural hybridity, as the experience of a human condition defined by finitude, cultivates a fundamental desire for contemplative freedom.

As Farley presents it, this freedom is neither ill-conceived as the absence of constraints, nor as residing in some form of ungrounded omnipotence that falsely suggests we have power to do anything or be anyone – that seductive delusion of modern North American myths of personal freedom. Instead, the “genuine freedom” that Farley conceives as emerging through contemplative attentiveness is grounded in an ontological context that takes a sober account of the vulnerabilities of an existence situated in a context finitude, and the blessings and curses found therein. Teleologically oriented by the concern to inhabit an existence with integrity, the freedom of contemplative *eros* is fundamentally associated with that which empowers in each of us an experience able to concretely authenticate the potential goodness embedded in our being.³⁷ For this reason, contemplative freedom is concerned to overcome those obstacles that hinder the concrete expression of the goodness of existence embedded in one’s being. Farley borrows from the ancient monastic vocabulary about the passions to discuss those dispositions we assent to, trained by habits, in ignorance. Farley’s description of darkness helps us recognize that opening ourselves to new understandings of reality encounters a resistance that she describes as involving the

³⁷ This understanding of Creation, as an existence oriented to expressing ever-increasing expressions of unique existence, allows the quality of originality to signify that quality which contributes to the ever-increasing perfection of a Creation whose telos is to manifest the fullness of existence in all the manifold possibilities of expression. In a context of cultural hybridity, Farley’s valuing of alterity allows for an interpretation of the increasing variety manifest through a context of cultural hybridity as that which must express Divine goodness. that makes the cultivation and preservation of that which expresses distinctiveness a matter of virtue, challenging the totalizing logic of understandings of virtue that would reward the suppression of distinctions and difference through conformity, rewarding the multiplication of similarity that further establishes dominance, rather than the alterity, the to be enriched by each expression of existence manifested

reluctance of the ego to being dislodged—

The ego maintains its centrality by habituation, skepticism, and fear. The habit of egocentrism is so deeply ingrained that it seems to be existence itself.³⁸

Love breaks free in us as we disarm and dislocate egocentrism...

The ego is not amused by this, for the egological structure of mind is intimately tied to the habit of egocentrism.³⁹ This intimacy is so thorough that it feels as if there were not difference between mind and ego at all...we feel as if the dislocation of the habit of egocentricity would be tantamount to ceasing to be a person altogether. We rightly resist images of humiliation or annihilation that imply personal existence has no place in contemplative desire.⁴⁰

Theologically grounded in the truth of God's enduring desire for union with us, Farley suggests contemplative *eros* cultivates in us the endurance necessary for us to seek the Divine even when the appeal of the good and evil tempt and distract us. Acknowledging that the struggles we experience sometimes coax us into settling idolatrously for pre-emptive satisfactions, or other times compel us to succumb to being overcome by the despair of hopelessness, Farley reminds us to be sober-mindedness about how fraught the path of contemplative faith is with the demons of doubt, fear, anxiety, insecurity, etc. Yet even in the midst of such struggles, Farley affirms that the path of contemplative *eros* has the ability inspire hope because, she insists, that the pain and struggle of such challenging experiences are, in fact, verily the path of faith, rather than the result of falling away from it. With this clarity, she offers a corrective to misunderstandings that falsely suggestion the path of faithfulness is without doubt, or fear, or anxiety, or insecurity, or discouragement, or despair.

³⁸ Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.130.

³⁹ Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.130.

⁴⁰ Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.130

Her understanding of the challenges confronted by a contemplative faith link Farley to the anthropological tradition epitomized by the ancient monastics, whose contemplative existence allowed them to recognize how the our passions -- those distortions and destructive habits capable of deceiving us about the truth of who we are and of impeding our ability to manifesting the goodness of our particular existence -- could disempower any experience blessedness. Thus, taking freedom to be primarily a release from the fictions of our passions that liberates a person to know who they really are, Farley conceptualizes “genuine freedom” as nothing less than being empowered to embody who you are, without falling prey to distortions or self-deceptions from within.

Thus liberated by the freedom wrought of a contemplative faith, Farley describes us as able to discover that Divine *Eros* ultimately flows through us, ecstatically expressed in an appreciative hospitality towards the goodness manifest in the existence of others. The theological anthropology that emerges from such an understanding of contemplative *eros* presents humanity, first and foremost, as an expression and embodiment of the loving presence of Divine *Eros*. Furthermore, Farley, like Augustine, insists that the manifold and increasing variety of existence arrayed in Creation, inclusive of human diversity, contributes to the divine perfection manifested by Creation. Indeed, just as Creation’s hospitality to the endless variety in existence reflects the conviction that divine perfection that is enhanced and expanded, rather than diminished or distorted, by each variation of human uniqueness -- it likewise follows that each unique instance of cultural hybrid created through intercultural convergence the truth of Divine Beauty is increased.

Her understanding of Divine Beauty as increasingly embodied in a universe still birthing creation in endlessly increasing perfection allows Farley to see Divine Goodness being multiplied rather than diminished, negated, or in any way diluted and weakened. Just

as Farley, in *Tragic Vision*, recognizes that a traditional philosophical understanding of perfection might insist that divine perfection is only manifest as that which is unchanging invulnerable to the flaw of change and transformation, so in *Eros For The Other*, Farley further criticizes the metaphysics generated by this philosophical suggestion of divine perfection. Engaging those concrete or political practices generated when that-which-is-Other-than-God is categorically defined as defiantly defiling divine perfection, Farley reveals how such an understanding of perfection can translate, politically, into a practice of totalitarian-like dominance that generates an ethics of hate and violence contrary to orthodox convictions about the loving benevolence of the Divine.⁴¹

Farley also draws upon Levinas' ethical necessity of the Other to empower a theological embrace of divine hospitality towards alterity, or the Other, as expressing the truth of Divine *Eros* for the greater perfection of relationship.⁴² Thus understood, Farleyan

⁴¹ Working with Arendt's criticism of totalitarianism, Farley exposes how perfection, defined similarity, generates an ethics of violence toward difference – punishing deviations from the norm in a destructive policy of monolithic conformity that upholds replication as expressing the truest “loyalty” to the ideal of Divine Perfection. Politically embodied as totalitarianism, the logical of this philosophical perfection calls for imitation, or cloned replication, not merely as the highest compliment, but as the only and mandatory form of existence tolerated. However, aligning similarity with perfection and difference with imperfection, interpretations of creation dependent upon this philosophical paradigm of Divine Perfection struggled to find a rhetorically organic relationship between creation and Creator. Where the Divine Perfection excluded that which was not the same, how could perfection be understood to relate to, much less be caused by, that which was not Divine, or imperfect?

⁴² The understanding of Divine hospitality I highlight here most interestingly approximates a theological understanding of beauty developed by 18th century, early American theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Edward Farley's historical investigation of the conceptualization of Beauty reveals that Edwards' expressed an understanding of primary beauty expressed in what Farley describes as “a disposition of benevolence to whatever exists.” In this definition, Edwards' anticipates my own definition of beauty as a praxis manifesting “an orientation of hospitality towards the good in existence.” By appropriating Wendy Farley's understanding of Creation (as an act of Divine love sharing the goodness of existence with other beings) to the struggles core to experiences of cultural hybridity, I

eros reinvigorates an orthodox valuing of the generative aspect of Creation, and redeems traditional interpretations of the alterity, core to the existence of the Other, from being demonized as that which separates Creation from the Creator. The otherness inherent in Creation is redeemed as expressive of imitating the Divine, and in particular, the necessary capacity of humanity to reproduce life by introducing only uniquely original variations of human being (rather than cloned replicas of any progenitor) is recognized as expressing the on-going fulfillment of Farleyan *eros*.

Indeed, the valuing of alterity allows for hybrid expressions of variety in human *being* that emerge - whether expressing a biological or cultural syncretism, or both – to be signified in Farley's theology of *Eros* for the Other as a concrete instance of Divine beauty being manifest in existence. And as such, expressions of hybrid diversity emerge symbolizing an increase in Divine goodness capable of adding to the existing perfection that has already been manifest in Creation.

Farley's understanding of Divine *Eros* allows her anthropology – summarized as human beings are created with the capacity to enjoy relationship with the Divine – to intersect with the ontological recognition that humanity's capacity to enjoy relationship with the Divine both mediates, and is mediated by, a relational structure of interdependence through which the clarity and fullness of experiencing God's love rests through our relationships with Others. *Eros* for the Other offers a compelling argument for why it is critical to our healing and theo-ethical empowerment accept and further forge ways of appreciating and integrating, whenever possible, those expressions of our interior otherness,

conceptualized an understanding of beauty as expressed in a hospitality (by God and ourselves) whose Love created space/affirmed the goodness of those distinctions expressed through the existence of cultural hybrids. This will be discussed in further detail later in our read of Genesis 3, and the woman's praxis of beauty.

that is, the otherness within ourselves. It is at this intersection of theological anthropology and ontology that Farley's reflections on Divine *Eros* empowers a very helpful analysis of contemplation as that praxis of desire most appropriate to our nature as "God-bearers."

As "God-bearers," desire emerges as the practice most appropriate to imitate as we seek to realize our embodiment as creatures designed with the capacity to long a desire akin to thirst for water, until the truth of God's love is realized fully in us.

Contemplation is an analogous awakening of desire. With this awakening, awareness dawns of how little we are able to love, how bound we are to our fears. This is why great saints describe themselves as such terrible "sinners." They become more and more aware of this infinity of love within us and available to us, just as knowledge of that single word, "water" made Helen know that a universe of connection was available to her. From the tiniest taste of Holy Eros, the infinity of love manifest in every soul and spiraling through the endlessness of our own soul is apprehended. The thirst of contemplation lives in the gap between that single taste and the infinity of the cosmos.⁴³

It is a taste of the infinite that awakens our yearning for the infinite within us. Thus, Farley's work on contemplation insists that as we must nevertheless practice the spiritual discipline of seeking in order to recognize how appropriate and akin to our nature as divine to embrace a contemplative faith: created to bear the image of God, the practice of contemplative desire begins with the conviction that need and can hunger for greater intimacy with God. This fragile tension between human freedom and responsibility is one that Farley wants to maintain in the "tragic vision" that she finds offering the most compelling theological ontology. That we continue to be capable of exercising power to make decisions in contexts where we have little or no control of the outcomes, remains not less an ethical mandate despite the undeniable vulnerability we experience as human

⁴³ Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.122

beings.⁴⁴ However limited the ability to determine one's path, and however deprived of that crucial glimpse of a larger reality that would compel a different choosing, Farley maintains that the true genius of the anthropology of desire preserved in ancient Greek tragedies remains the fundamental recognition: human freedom is not merely a *matter of action*, but more primarily a freedom of *disposition* to pursue/embrace the truth of one's being.

Human freedom remains the key to related notions of resistance that Farley admires in the ancient tragedies that tell the stories of virtuous Greeks, such as Prometheus and Antigone. The lives of these tragic heroes are not marked by passive or despairing acquiescence to the Fates but rather the defiant exercise of freedom, determined to pursue the integrity of the good desired in the face of downfall.⁴⁵ Through Farley, we learn that the manner in which tragic heroes embrace (or fail to embrace) their imminent demise helps confirm the outcome of the heroes' choice. Farley reminds us of this critical insight: because human life is ontologically structured for relationality, that which confirms the truth of who we know ourselves to be, can no less empower transformations in who we are called to be, our community relationships, and our relationship with those god-like or Divinely ordained contingencies of our existence, i.e. need for food, water, sleep; economic constraints that effect professional performance, as well as educational and recreation, spheres.

Most significantly, Farley suggests that if these tragic heroes could have managed to

⁴⁴ When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was imprisoned in a Nazi concentration camp, despite being stripped of manifold freedoms and necessary conditions for thriving, Bonhoeffer neither insisted he was without the capacity to act according to his faith or conscience, nor desired to do so. As Farley maintains, no doctrine of predestination or fatalistic philosophy of determinism is able to absolve humanity of having responsibility for our actions.

⁴⁵ Interesting to note, in such instances the heroes' downfalls do not reflect a violation of who they are; rather their choices empower the fulfillment of the truth of their being, even as their destinies are sealed. Their virtue – embedded in the virtue of *who they are*, and the *kind of beings they are*, as well as their *particular way of expressing human existence* is not diminished by even the loss of existence as they know it.

avoid their failing -- figuring out, instead, how to save their lives -- in a very real sense, these heroes would have violated who they were, and in doing so, become imprisoned in an existence ill-fitting them. Therefore, she interprets that the freedom of being human as never being entirely violated, even while it becomes the case that the various contingencies of a finite existence extinguish the availability of choices. Moreover, unwilling to deny the freedom implicit in human experiences of desire, Farley insists there is an existential integrity implicit in the ancient Greek refusal to interpret human suffering as either, necessarily deserved or resulting from a transgression of the Divine.

Influenced alternatively by the compassionate anthropology of Greek tragedies, Farley suggests that human struggle and suffering are often inexplicable, and best appreciated as the tragic consequences of inhabiting an existence inscribed by profound and persistent limitations, unalleviated even by the truth of human agency. In her analysis of contemplative experiences, Farley's develops this tragic sensibility in her theological anthropology, insisting that the tragic dimension of the human condition is not merely introduced by the constraints of finitude, but augmented by a vocational longing for intimacy with God that is fated, in this lifetime, only to secure our contact with persistent struggle and suffering. Despite this, Farley's anthropology refuses to absolve humanity of either the freedom to desire God, or accountability for the limited outcome resulting from those limited choices we can make (often with no greater "freedom" than desiring the good in the face of our, or another's, harm and hurt). The influence of the Greek Tragedian's brilliance persists as Farley's contemplative anthropology presents us with an entirely knowable humanity whose desire to seek truth-in-being through intimacy with God brings on a plague of struggle and suffering that invites our compassion.

Even as we read of humanity seeking to embrace its destiny to "become like God,

knowing good and evil” in Genesis 3, in the spirit of the Greek tragedian Farley’s anthropology invites us to refuse assigning any guilt of blame to the “hero.” Rather, learning the compassion of the tragedian, Farley calls us to reject practices of condemnation (whether towards ourselves or others) as contemplative practices invariably expose our lack and inability, as well as our doubt and uncertainty. Instead, Farley’s anthropology invites us to embrace all tenderness while we struggle and suffer. Internalizing the truth of ourselves as lovingly called beloved of God, Farley describes contemplative desire as growing in us the courage to recognize our vocation as designed for union with the Divine. In the freedom to be faithful to our vocation as “God-bearers,” we will discover that Farley gives us grounds to reject even the inadequacy of obedience, discerning the cost and delight of a maturing faithfulness. By allowing contemplative *eros* to interpret how experience desire as we seek to hear the Divine in the Edenic narrative, we are looking to discern the truth of blessedness emerging through the text. Because at its core, Farley recognizes the nature of contemplation to be a process of awakening desire:

Contemplation is an analogous awakening of desire. With this awakening, awareness dawns of how little we are able to love, how bound we are to our fears.

But what hope of edification we have, we are told bluntly, will be mediated through an ever increasing intimacy with how impoverished our capacity to love is, and assailed by all manner of requisite doubts, struggle, suffering and pain which accompany such experiences of our own lack and need. While not the most appealing of invitations forward, the gift that emerges through Farley’s description is the reassurance that the relentless nature of contemplative desire serves to bring us to that which we seek—despite all evidence to the contrary.

Dedication to our desire does not free us from errors. But in

it we grow to feel more strongly than ever that “my heart is bound, my soul is chained to the rock.” That is the only security we are likely to know.⁴⁶

In this relentlessness resides the capacity of desire to engage even those painful experiences of struggles—of our experiences with hybridity, and in particular immigrant experiences of cultural hybridity – to function with crucible-like power, purifying our disappointments in a transformation that propel us through dissatisfaction that might otherwise debilitate with paralysis:

Through all of our mistakes, our lack of clarity, desire continues to seek out what draws it. The urgency of desire moves us through the difficulties we encounter and allows them to be purifying rather than overwhelming. They describe the suffering that accompanies contemplative desire, deeply aware of the painfulness of desire as well as its trustworthiness.⁴⁷

Yet desire’s relentlessness through such difficult of experiences offers testimony of its very trustworthiness. According to Farley, it is desire’s refusal to relent of its longing despite the difficulties and pain its path leads us through that qualifies contemplative desire as most appropriate guide journey as we press on to that which we find we must seek, regardless of how disorienting, discouraging, disempowering the effects of desiring may prove to be:

Desire is a like a magnet, weak at first and finding the object that pulls it only with difficulty. Naturally, we make mistakes and are tortured by doubt. We remain unclear about what to do, believe, practice; whom to believe; how to test the wandering insights of our hearts. We can be aided by all of the resources available to us, *but it is desire itself that draws us implacably to our Beloved.*⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Quoting from Emmy Lou Harris. Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.129.

⁴⁷ Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.123.

⁴⁸ Farley, *Weaving Heaven and Earth*, p.123

In this way, a Farleyan understanding of contemplative desire reconceptualizes the “oneing” we seek: rather than a teleological orientation, the nature of desire is revealed to be, as previously illumined: epistemological – capable of increasing our understanding as we seek.

The knowing that emerges from our seeking is ironically about how desire for the bliss of union with the Divine renders us discontent as we discover, through the many encounters we are led, that they are not the Beloved we seek:

Contemplative desire awakens us to the unity of the love of God and neighbor, but it does not accomplish the perfection of this love; *it rather incites our thirst for it*. When Helen Keller crouched by the water pump while Annie poured water over her hand and spelled the word for water over and over, in her blindness she experienced nothing but water and the strange movement of fingers on her palm. We are “commanded” to love. Love pours over us like water, and the meaning of love is spelled into our hand over and over. But like Helen, we are blind and enraged by our blindness, and we cannot understand its meaning. But suddenly, Helen grasped the connection between the fingers of her palm and the water pouring over her hand. Grasping this connection did not itself open all of the world of language and meaning and human relationship to her, but it fired her desire for these things.⁴⁹

Likewise, in hybridity our desire for existential integrity is not fulfilled at the “end” of our journey, but it rather serves us through the knowledge -- of who we are, the kind of beings we are, and the kind of longings that compel us – mediated to us as we attend to experiences of our desires.

As we read Genesis 3 and examine the function of the woman’s desire, the significance of conceptualizing an understanding of faith mediated by desire is crystallized.

⁴⁹ Farley continues of Helen Keller: “Over many years, her desire continued to burn. It took her from solitary confinement of darkness and silence to friendship, Radcliff, social activism, and intimacy with God.”

The biblical narrative reveals how *eros* inspires a coming to consciousness in the woman. This consciousness, in turn, empowers an intentionality able to express a choice that has the power to make manifest what is deemed desirable. What is important to recognize in all this is how desire stimulates greater awareness in multiple directions simultaneously. Farley's insight, that "the economy of desire is not toward possession," takes on further clarity in our subsequent read of Genesis 3. There we will see how the serpent's introduction to what is desirable for the woman only makes her more aware of the *tov* that is yet lacking in her experience. This first introduction to human desire helps us to see the double-edged gift of erotic struggle: embedded in the woman's experience of *eros* we discover how the "curse" of desiring that awakens one to the suffering of lack, nevertheless imparts the "blessing" of discontent. When, by her faithful attentiveness to her experience of *eros* the woman cultivates an awareness of the good that she lacks, she gives permission to the power of discontent to stir up still greater opportunity for awareness: Is what is desired truly so desirable? Is the value and worth of what is desired, worth the cost required?

In such faithful wrestling to discern the greatest good and her highest best the woman emerges as having courage enough to love the *tov* of fulfilling her human vocation. But it is in choosing from, with, and through attentiveness to what her soul desires, or *erotic faithfulness*, that the woman cultivates the sufficient freedom in decision-making that constitutes conscious choice. This practice of *erotic faithfulness* begets in the woman the reward of a consciousness – both of the *tov* of the tree, and her desire for the *tov* it offers – which is sufficiently powerful to empower her to act with clarity of understanding and intentional desire. In doing so, her intentionality emerges potent enough to empower the manifesting of the *tov* she desires.

The lens of Farley's erotic faith allows us to see how the woman models *erotic*

faithfulness, and therefore can be perceived as humanity's vocation to be "God-bearers."

The woman is not wrestling against God, or what God deemed *tov*. To the contrary, the woman's decision-making process, as well as her decision, is marked by a faithfulness of desire to know the fulfillment of the *tov* that is potential in her. *Erotic faithfulness*, as an orientation towards faithfulness energized by the desire for the fulfillment of our highest *tov*, describes a faithfulness of intent that, mediated by human desire, is vital to empowering the fulfillment of humanity's highest vocation to be "God-bearers" engaged in the work of co-creating with the Divine.

On one level, to assert that the woman acts with *erotic faithfulness* is simply to suggest the woman acts from faithfulness of desire. Yet the act of being faithful or to desire does not, in and of itself, indicate that virtue is present. Indeed, as exemplified by Cain's acquiescence to his desire in the very next chapter, it can represent the fulfillment of the basest, most reprehensible capacities that shadow humanity's potential for virtue. *Erotic faithfulness* reveals Eve to be faithful to God, and the *tov* of God's intention in creating humankind.

In this sense, *erotic faithfulness* becomes the energy of our vindication in the face of consequences of the immediate clarity of blessedness. Most significantly, what characterizes *erotic faithfulness* as the fullest expression of human virtue is an essential quality of conscious intention that makes it possible to empower the actual *tov* that is seen as potential prior to the decision to act in faithful desire towards that *tov*. As seen in Genesis 3, *erotic faithfulness* is what empowers the woman's acting with the capacity to actualize, or make real, the truth of the *tov* desired. Thus, I suggest *erotic faithfulness* is not merely an expression of faithfulness because it is oriented by desire to be faithful, but emerges in Genesis 3 as a practice of truth – imbued by the attentive power of conscious intention – capable of actualizing (making

known and making manifest/bringing into existence) the desired *tov* being called forth in love.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Through this understanding of *erotic faithfulness* the woman's decision-making process, as well as her decision, is offered as a refutation of traditional interpretations of Genesis 3 that uphold compliance as the highest expression of virtue, and argue that the woman precipitates humanity's fall through disobedience. As a form of faithfulness, *eros* does not release the woman until through the desire of love, inspiring her with the courage to face and engage ambiguity -- born of oscillating fears/hopes and doubts/trust which assail any experience of contemplating choices between competing possibilities of goodness -- until she comes to sufficient consciousness about which *tov* is to be desired in that moment above the other possibilities of *tov*. It is the courageous trust of blessedness that creates a space of consciousness: she owns the agency of freedom to enact the faithfulness that empowers her greatest good and calls forth her highest best.

The day of my awakening was the day I saw
and knew I saw
all things in God
and God in all things.

~ Mechthild of Magdeburg

Chapter Five

Eden Revisited: A Praxis of Beauty in Creation

Introduction

What follows is not a source critical or historical exegetical read of Genesis 3. This means that I am not asking about the history of the text, or attempting to discern the original intent of the authors. I am reading the text of Genesis 1-3 in its final form as a cohesive narrative. I am engaging in a literary and theological reading, which means that I take the text as literature that expresses theological concerns.

Genesis 3 is a story of desire that reveals the nature of loving faithfulness between humanity and God. It is a story that helps us discover how the *tov*, that goodness and beauty, embedded in and mediated throughout Creation conspire to inspire humanity's faithfulness. By awakening our desire to know the truth and fulfillment of the highest good possible for our existence, the *tov* we encounter compels us to learn the singular importance of relationality-in-partnership. Indeed, the genius of divine intention is revealed in how the *tov* manifest in Creation flourishes best in partnership: only in relationship with the woman does the *tov* of the serpent's oracular gift manifest; only in partnership with the serpent does humanity learn that knowing good and evil is how they are intended "to become like God"; only in partnership with the *tov* of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are the eyes of humanity opened to know/experience/realize the truth of *tov*'s vulnerability in Creation; in partnership together, the woman and man fulfill their vocation as "God-bearers" -- the likeness of God they are created to manifest.⁵¹

⁵¹ Later in Genesis 4, it will be Cain's inability to conceive of partnership with his brother, Abel, that results in the fall of humanity as Cain eliminates the one he fears has what he has not: the approval, acceptance that Abel receives from God causes Cain to destroy in anger - an expression of fear turned outward.

Indeed, trained by Schleiermacher's understanding of the Original Perfection of the World, we are able to discern the brilliance of a divine intelligence whose perfection orders Creation such that even experiences of thwarted *tov* are capable of empowering the kind of frustrated desire which awakens humanity's desire for its fullest and most beautiful *tov*. Further, in how the narrative depicts the realization of the serpent's vocation as oracle of God, or the Tree of the Knowledge's capacity to nourish, delight, and make humanity wise, or in how humanity is awakened to its vocation as "God-bearers" embodying the likeness of God, the chapter bears witness to how divine intelligence structures the diversity of existence in Creation through a dynamic of relationality that requires each partner to honor its own vocation in the process of realizing the fullest *tov* of others and all.

Still one more story is being woven through the narrative while the events of Genesis 3 are unfolding. This partner narrative reveals God's intention to continue communicating loving kindness as humanity and Creation experience increasing vulnerability to the *tov* of finitude structuring all creaturely existence. Premised by the stubborn insistence that Divine benevolence is unchanging, this partner narrative enables us to perceive how the intention of creaturely faithfulness is imbued with the power to secure opportunities to co-create with the Divine. Interpreted through the theological lens of divine benevolence, Genesis 3 testifies of the perfection of divine love responding to humanity in a partnership able to draw out the fullest *tov* potent in Creation. God acts through a *benevolent creation* to ensure that the blessedness abounds to all, undiminished even as humanity, the serpent, and the ground each experience vulnerabilities quintessential to who they are and their relationships with each other.

Reading Genesis 3 as a narrative inherently offering assurance of humanity's enduring blessedness stands in striking contrast to traditional interpretations that have long

insisted the chapter tells the story of original blessing arrested – of blessing lost to divine punishment and deprivation as a consequence of rank disobedience and rebellion. This alternative narrative offering emerges as we honor the narrative interdependence of Genesis 3 with the one developed in the two prior chapters of Genesis. Read through the theological perspective of Divine *Eros*, beneficent hospitality and *benevolent creation* established through Genesis 1 and 2, Genesis 3 continues as a story of God’s lavish and empowering hospitality sharing the *toḅ* of existence with Otherness that is expressed as the plurality of *toḅ* in Creation. The theological conviction of *benevolent creation* -- that the perfection of *toḅ* so thoroughly established in Genesis 1 persists utterly undiminished in Genesis 3 -- yields the clarity that even the vulnerability of finitude, as it permeates all Creation, mediates awareness of the completeness (rather than the diminishment) of divine benevolence. Understood thus, finitude is recognized as a dimension of *toḅ* in Creation: it, too, expresses a vital goodness and beauty contributing to the perfection of an enduringly benevolent Creation.

As the conditions of finitude are taken to manifest rather than inhibit the benevolence of divine love conceived in, as, and through Creation, neither the enmity between humanity and serpent-kind (experienced by humanity as a striving for territorial dominance), nor the domestication of wilderness by agricultural cultivation (the diminishment of the wilderness territory); neither the correlative intensification of toil required to cultivate new crops in previously undomesticated land, nor the intensification of difficulty in conception and pain in carrying pregnancies to term; indeed, not even the necessity of an existence limited by death, succeeds in thwarting the benevolence of divine love birthed in Creation.

This is because, regardless of how hardship, toil, struggle, and pain rise to challenge humanity’s journey in Genesis 3 – at no time does the narrative depict such experiences as

imbued with the capacity to separate humanity from the tenacious benevolence of Divine Love. Nor is there evidence of alienation between humanity and the Divine. Instead, the narrative bears witness to how the compassion of Divine love persists with unwavering intention, empowering the protection and assurance of provision necessary for humanity to fulfill the very intention set forth by the divine Genesis 1 – that humanity “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it...and have dominion over everything that moves...” (NRSV)⁵²

Further, this approach allows us to appreciate how the finitude that structures Creation makes it possible to recognize how the vulnerability of *toʿv* foregrounds humanity’s experience of what constitutes the knowing of good and evil. Therefore, the condition of cursedness emerges as a dimension of ontological consciousness, empowering/empowered by the awareness (of good and evil) that the very goodness and beauty of what is *toʿv* mediates the experience of vulnerability. The anxiety and terror of losing what is so precious and treasured constitutes the knowing of evil. Thus, whether embedded in the awareness that effortful toil and laborious struggle necessarily characterize the man’s work of tilling the ground beyond the garden, or reflected in the increase of painful struggle and difficulties in the woman’s experience of conception and pregnancy, Genesis 3 depicts knowledge of evil

⁵² Gen. 1:26 ¶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Gen. 1:27 So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

Gen. 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Gen. 1:29 God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.

as contingent upon humanity's consciousness of *tov*'s vulnerability. Because this vulnerability is discerned only correspondingly as the value of *tov* becomes evident to humanity, the knowing of good and evil emerges as appreciative consciousness of the inherent vulnerability of the *tov* organic to Creation

Far from representing evidence of God's displeasure – traditionally served up as forms of punishing hardship and struggle for the human recipients – the finitude presented in Genesis 3 enlightens us with an awareness of how the very limits and boundaries structuring all existence foreground our ability to encounter God's *faithfulness*, rather than divine wrath, in Creation. The limits and boundaries that hinder and frustrate humanity's unlimited or endless access to the *tov* available in Creation, also emerge as the same conditions capable of revealing how divine love responds benevolently through compassionate protection of, and enduring provision for, humanity.

Further more, viewed through the intelligence of *erotic faithfulness*, the woman's decision to eat of the tree of knowledge in this chapter emerges as an act of human faithfulness. This is because implicit in the serpent's oracle, "if you eat of it you will be like God, knowing good and evil," is the clarity that humanity's failure to eat of the tree will result in their correlative inability to be like God.⁵³ In other words, humanity would fail to bear the likeness of the Divine, a sacred vocation Genesis 1.26 makes clear as being ordained

⁵³ The text of Genesis 3.4-5 presents the serpent as addressing an audience beyond woman and therefore makes clear that the serpent's oracle must be understood as accounting for more than the woman's fate. If it were just the woman's fate being described by the serpent, its declaration, "you will not die" would be conjugated as feminine and singular. Yet the verb phrases used by the serpent are conjugated as masculine and plural and, offering the narrative clarity that the serpent's oracle addresses the fate of an audience wider than just the woman. Genesis 3.6 further indicates the man was with woman, inviting the interpretive awareness that, at a minimum, the man's destiny is also accounted for in the serpent's oracle.

for humanity at the time of their inception. Understood from this perspective, the narrative empowers the interpretive realization that woman's discernment of how the tree's *tov* partners to enliven the flourishing of her own *tov*, and her subsequent act in eating and sharing the tree's fruit, embodies the laudable decision that prevent the woman and the man from failing to fulfill their sacred vocation: that of manifesting their likeness with God.

Demonstrating the virtue of discerning courage, woman does not foolishly disdain the arresting clarity of the serpent's claims about the sacred significance of humanity's relationship with the tree, nor faithlessly delegate the responsibility of enacting her own agency to the authority of a clarity received second-hand.⁵⁴ The woman neither acts from mindless compliance to the authority of a past instruction given to another, nor yields her responsibility to account for what is authoritative to the word of another. She demonstrates courage by exercising her own authority in discerning the truth of the tree's *tov* and embraces the responsibility of her agency in delighting the truth *tov* fulfilled through their partnership.

Just as Divine *eros* demonstrates the benevolence of hospitality by welcoming into existence the *tov* of Otherness expressed as and through Creation, the woman and man imitate such a hospitality in their delighting of the tree. Imitating the creative nature of the divine hospitality in Creation, humanity offers hospitality to the otherness of *tov* presented by the tree, and delights in it through a partnership that realizes a *tov* which cannot emerge apart from their alliance together. In this way, humanity ultimately co-creates, with the Divine and Creation, to author an experience of existence that manifests the power of benevolent hospitality to transform potential *tov* into actual *tov*.

⁵⁴ The text of Genesis 2 makes clear the woman was not yet created at the time the Lord God instructed the man with the command not to eat of the tree of knowing good and evil. The commands are all directed towards the man, indicated in the verbs being conjugated for a masculine, singular recipient.

The truth of virtue inherent in this choice is emerges more luminously in considering the nature of what constitutes virtue. Where obedience is depicted as the epitome of faithfulness, it can be difficult to determine whether the truth of virtue is embedded in a decision to comply. This is because it often remains unclear whether the “goodness” of compliant behavior was motivated by the desire to protect one’s self from harm or some loss of benefit, or motivated from a desire to honor the giver of the prohibition, or motivated by genuine desire to realize that which is *tov*, regardless of any correlative rewards? Indeed, where the presence of reward or punishment is made clear, the understandable logic of self-interest reveals that the compliance of obedience, when motivated by desire avoiding punish, or to secure benefits, including the favor reaped from honoring the giver of the prohibition, is desire for the *tov* of reward, rather than a confirmation of faithfulness. In this sense, obedience cannot be said demonstrate the virtue of faithfulness where avoidance of harm or loss is reward can be premised as the *tov* desired. Where reward and punishment are prescribed, it becomes ambiguous whether the obedience of compliance is fueled by the understandable intelligence of self-interest (seeking the good for the sake of self-concern), or the truth of virtue that expresses a faithfulness to that which is *tov* for its own sake – that is, apart from the promise of reward or punishment.

But illumined by the clarity that both the man and the woman are aware that eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil will confirm the truth of their mortal nature, humanity’s decision to choose to partner with tree in order to fulfill the *tov* of their vocation as “God-bearers” empowers the narrative of Genesis 3 to decisively reveal the truth of humanity’s faithfulness. Indeed, when combined with the witness of Genesis 2 that depicts the man being given a divine warning about the consequence of eating of the tree, and the witness of Genesis 3 that demonstrates the woman’s awareness of the same

consequence, the story of Eden is permitted to attest to the virtue of humanity's faithfulness, the serpent's knowledge that humanity will become like God in eating of the tree, the story of Eden is transformed. When the woman and the man each act to embrace the promise of vocational fulfillment inherent in their eating of the tree of knowledge, despite knowing that doing so will confirm their mortality, the narrative offers evidence that they act, not from fearful avoidance of loss, but from *erotic faithfulness*, a faithfulness borne of desire for nothing less than the fulfillment of their highest and best good.

In fact, an understanding of the nature of virtue as that faithfulness to the highest *tov* all but necessitates the narrative presence of a command associated with consequences of loss, such as is given to the man by the Divine, because only in choosing of that highest *tov* even in the face of the promised loss, does faithfulness emerge. A command empowers obedience that reveals the virtue of compliance, but no until a command is violated, so that humanity takes responsibility for authoring the truth of their highest *tov* despite the promise of divine disappointment and loss, can the virtue of their faithfulness emerge so clearly.

The Good Serpent

Genesis 3.1 Now the serpent was more crafty **עָרוּם**⁵⁵ than any other wild **שָׂדֵה**⁵⁶ animal **תַּיִת**⁵⁷ that the LORD God

⁵⁵ Strong's "6175. עָרוּם {aruwm, aw-room'; passive participle of 6191; cunning (usually in a bad sense):—crafty, prudent, subtil."

נָחָשׁ (נחש) Noun common masculine singular absolute *serpent*

⁵⁶ 7704. שָׂדֵה *sav-deb'*; or שָׂדֵי *sav-dah'-ee*; from an unused root meaning to spread out; a field (as flat):—country, field, ground, land, soil, x wild.

שָׂדֵה (ננ) Noun common masculine singular absolute *field*

⁵⁷ תַּיִת (היה) Noun common feminine singular construct *animal, beast*

had made עָשָׂה⁵⁸. He said to the woman,⁵⁹ “Did God say,
 ‘You shall not eat תֹּאכְלוּ⁶⁰ from any tree in the garden
 עֵץ הַיָּדָע?”

The serpent in Genesis 3 is much maligned in Christian interpretive traditions as an embodiment of “the devil.” Notably, Augustine identifies the serpent as the Satan who comes in disguise to trick humanity into rebellion against God, and Tribble who names the serpent, “the tempter” for its role in precipitating the woman’s seduction into disobedience. And not to be outdone, Cassuto offers an interpretation of the serpent as the vocalization of the woman’s cunning, in a parabolic duologue between the woman’s innocence and cunning!⁶¹ This despite that he matter-of-factly concedes the anachronistic nature of asserting associations between the serpent of Genesis 3 and doctrines of Satan.⁶²

⁵⁸ עָשָׂה (עשה) 1-עשה Verb qal perfect third masculine singular *to do, make*

⁵⁹ Phyllis Tribble notes, “The context for the advent of woman is a divine judgment, ‘It is not good that ‘adham should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Genesis 2.18) Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of the Academy of Religion*, Vol. 41, No.1. (Mar., 1973), pp.30-48.

⁶⁰ תֹּאכְלוּ אכל Verb qal **imperfect** second masculine plural *to eat*

⁶¹ In answer to the question of the serpent’s nature in Genesis 3, Cassuto appropriates it as a representation of human cunning, “In the ultimate analysis, we have here an allegorical illusion to the craftiness to be found in man himself.” And while he initially suggests that the serpent represents an allegorical allusion to humanity’s capacity for “slyness,” when pressed to establish the serpent’s identity, he concretizes the serpent’s identity as a *gendered* voice, or the “sly cunning of the woman.” Cassuto’s characterization of the woman – ill-equipped with an intelligence and self-awareness unable to distinguish between distorted perceptions and reality, and prone to imagining that the projection of her own desires represents the “secret intentions” of others -- offers an analysis of human nature as made vulnerable by ignorance and prone to distorted misperceptions. From this single allegory, Cassuto deems it possible to address four exegetical concerns generated by the passage: the identity of the serpent, the nature and concern of the conversation between the serpent and woman concern, what the woman reveals about humanity, and an account for the nature and origin of evil in human experience.

⁶² “The doctrine of Satan as an evil opposed to the Deity is considerably later than the story of the Fall.”

Even Mitchell, while genuinely departing from an interpretative vein suggesting that the serpent is evil, nevertheless comes to blame the serpent for acting as one who, albeit inadvertently, facilitates the fall.⁶³ Still, in his dismissal of theories associating the serpent's identity with Satan, Mitchell highlights the rhetorical contradiction inherent in arguments that posit the serpent-as-Satan, all the while suggesting the etiological function of Genesis 3 is to explain how evil comes into the world: "The introduction of a positively evil being would have forestalled the very object of the story, viz., to explain the origin of evil in the world."⁶⁴

Mitchell also refuses to ignore the objective ethical implications of arguments scapegoating the serpent/creature for doing evil while vindicating the God who creates it for that purpose. He further reminds readers that the position and identity of *ha-satan*, as laid out in Job 1.6, is that of "a son of God and a member of the heavenly court" in order to refute the validity of suggestions correlating the figure of the Satan with an evil interpretation of the serpent. Serpent-as-Satan contradicts the clear scriptural witness of the Satan's position in the divine counsel as one divinely regarded:

This interpretation, like the allegorical, breaks down when applied to the penalty inflicted on the serpent; for a) either the serpent alone is punished, and the power of which it was the tool overlooked or b) Satan is condemned to a degradation which hardly harmonizes with his subsequent position as son of God and member of the heavenly court. See Job 1:6.⁶⁵

Thus, not only would the punishment of the serpent-as-Satan render God guilty of the fundamental injustice of punishing a creature for acting in accordance to its assigned

⁶³ "...(cf. 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1; see also Piepenbring, *Theology of the Old Testament* p. 256ff)." Mitchell, 921.

⁶⁴ Mitchell, 921.

⁶⁵ Mitchell, 921.

nature, but if the stature and position clearly associated with *ha-satan* in Job 1.6 is taken into account, the serpent can neither be regarded as evil or deserving of punishment. Helped by Mitchell to see how an identity of the serpent-as-Satan is neither historically viable, nor rhetorically defensible, we return to the text to reconsider the fundamental question: What is the nature and identity of the serpent?⁶⁶

Gen 3.1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

There is both immediate clarity and intriguing ambiguity in what the introductory verse of Genesis 3 teaches us about the serpent. Unambiguously, we are told the serpent is a creature made by the Lord God. From this simple description of the relationship between the serpent and the Lord God, it becomes possible to infer two facts about the nature of the serpent. It is a creature belonging to the order of Creation – the same order deemed *tov* by God, not once, but seven times in Genesis 1. Therefore, as part of that created existence deemed, in its entirety, *tov* by its creator, we can also understand the serpent’s nature to be equally and unequivocally *tov*. That is to say, Genesis 3.1 establishes the serpent’s existence and having a nature that is good and beautiful.

⁶⁶ During an early dissertation consultation, Dianne Diakité offered the insight that in African culture serpents mythologically represent an epistemological and mystical bridge. She indicated that serpents could travel the mystical enlivening space between the divine and human with knowledge beyond earthly limits. “The serpent is a treasured creature/symbol in many African cultures connecting humans to the divine community. The serpent travels across and in between the mystical border marking the visible (land) and invisible (water) world domains and thus remains a symbol for initiates on the path to responsible expressions of humanhood. The path to exhibiting mature and responsible humanity always entails developing the knowledge/wisdom and techniques essential for cooperative and hospitable relationships in the visible-invisible cosmos.” In her suggestion, Dianne prophetically anticipated the future identity of the serpent as primordial oracle that would eventually emerge. Callaway S221, Dissertation Consultation. Emory University, Atlanta, GA. August, 2006.

‘Arum

The same description offers another relational clarity about the serpent’s nature and identity: the serpent, as a creature of the wilderness, a “beast of the field,” is distinguished from its wilderness peers by the intriguing characterization that it embodies superlative *‘arum*. The term, *‘arum*, is used to describe a distinctively discerning epistemological capacity. *‘Arum* indicates that the good serpent exercised a kind of anticipatory knowing (distinguished from the static connotation of data or information associated with the noun “knowledge”) more closely associated with a dynamic perceiving.

Usage elsewhere reveals that *‘arum* describes/characterizes a knowing that offers a pre-emptive and strategic awareness, and functionally enables the one with *‘arum* to act effectively in securing a positive and desired outcome. *‘Arum* comes to have the connotation of a habitus associated with virtue as it facilitates the goodness of the one acting with *‘arum*, whether by anticipating how to secure the good, or by pre-emptive avoidance of harm, preventing and protecting against an undesired outcome. Hence, in English, *‘arum* comes to be translated in the positive as “prudence,” or more negatively as “cunning.”⁶⁷

This understanding of *‘arum*, preceded by a description of the serpent as belonging to the *to‘v* of creation ordered by God, clearly invites an understanding of the serpent as superlative to its peers in demonstrating the prudent virtue of *‘arum*, rather than its shadow side in cunning.⁶⁸ Thus we find in Genesis 3 a good serpent who is not only counted as a

⁶⁷ In the different version, *‘arum* is translated in the following ways: NRSV 1990 “crafty,” KJVS “subtil,” NET “shrewd,” KJV “subtil,” JPS “shrewest,” ASV “subtle,”

⁶⁸ Early Canadian exegete, Ross G. Murison, likewise posits that in common usage *‘arum* [עָרוּם] is consistently used to connote a praise-worthy power of discernment capable of imparting wisdom. With specific allusion to the Genesis 3, Murison clearly correlates this quality as able to alleviate humanity’s condition in the narrative, “The quality attributed to it

creature contributing to the perfection of *tov* manifest in God's creation, but also one whose distinctive epistemological capacity, or knowing, distinguishes it as possessing a prudence superlative among its community.

To this clarity, we add the further abundance of textual evidence from Ancient Near Eastern sources attesting to a heritage long and richly familiar with serpents both able to speak and known to possess that knowledge associated with our serpent who knows what God knows.⁶⁹ It becomes possible to posit the serpent's ancient association with the divine

is [ערום] a word of the same root as [ערמה] the highly praised discretion, or power of discernment which is to be given to the simple, to those of open mind and needing instruction (Prov. 1:4); the condition in which Adam and Eve are described as being in before eating of the fruit." (p.128)

Furthermore, observing that the word for serpent נָחַשׁ *nabash* is used elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures to denote divination (Murison cites Gen. 30:27; Lev. 19:26; Numb. 23:23 as examples), and presents a view of the serpent as a creature widely-known and highly-esteemed for its reputation in wisdom. (p.117) Murison goes on to argue, therefore, that Babylonian sources for the narrative cannot be taken to be definitively insisting that Genesis 3 conveys a fall into sin. Based on the high reputation of the serpent for wisdom, he counters the possibility that the narrative describes humanity's epistemological awakening, "There is nothing to show definitely what is meant by the Babylonian picture, and it may well be, it represents, not the fall into sin, but the impartation of knowledge." (p. 128) Ross G. Murison, "The Serpent in the Old Testament," *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* Vol. 21, No. 2 (1905): 115-130.

⁶⁹ Murison states,

"Some critics find in the story of the fall two strats. In one the serpent is not evil but wise, and the initiator of mankind into knowledge, while in the other and later he becomes a tempter. As has been seen, the serpent was regarded by the Semites, as well as by other peoples as being the wisest of animals. In Genesis the wickedness of the serpent is not expressly declared, while its superior wisdom is emphasized. The quality attributed to it is [ערום] a word of the same root as [ערמה] the highly praised discretion, or power of discernment which is to be given to the simple, to those of open mind and needing instruction (Prov. 1:4); the condition in which Adam and Eve are described as being in before eating of the fruit. There is nothing to show definitely what is meant by the Babylonian picture, and it may well be, it represents, not the fall into sin, but the impartation of knowledge. There was a

and an exceptional quality of wisdom' offering support to the suggestion that the text offers more evidence of an esteemed view of the serpent than its opposite.⁷⁰ As we read Genesis 3.1, there emerges a clear paradigm of the serpent, not as evil and tempting humankind, but as wise and able to lead humankind to knowledge.⁷¹

That the narrative attaches the serpent's question immediately to the description of

Babylonian myth about a dragon which issued from the sea to teach the first people wisdom, and from the continual appearance of the sacred tree we may perhaps infer that the original form of the story was connected with this serpent and the tree.

Hence, Murison's research supports an understanding of the serpent—not as evil, but as wise, leading humankind to knowledge instead of being a tempter.

Early in his reflections on the serpent, Cassuto seeks an understanding of the serpent's nature and identity that accounts for why: 1) "if the serpent were only an ordinary animal, why does Scripture tell us he *spoke*?" and 2) "how could a mere animal know all that the serpent here knows, including even the hidden purpose of the Lord God?" Following an exhaustive review of the available written and pictorial evidence of serpents known "to the peoples of the ancient East," --including the myriad possibilities among "...all kinds of snakes: sacred serpents, serpent-gods or serpents that symbolize deities, serpents that are symbols of life and fertility, serpents that guard the sanctuaries or the boundaries, serpents used for 'divining' future events, and so forth..." – Cassuto declares, "no serpents have been found corresponding in character to the one in this section." Cassuto, 140.

Why Cassuto claims to have found no parallels in the ANE to a serpent who has the ability to speak and is associated with divine knowing is puzzling in light of Murison's clear findings to the contrary: oracular snakes being among these possible types available to the mythic culture and historical traditions known to have inspired the scriptural reference. Instead, Cassuto settles for an understanding of the serpent as symbol of evil and rebellion; and this despite the fact that Cassuto (rightly) takes pains to explain that the serpent of Genesis 3 is not suggested in any way by the text to have been rebellious against its maker given its clear identification as "a beast of the field the Lord God had made."

⁷⁰ "The serpent was regarded by the Semites, as well as by other peoples as being the wisest of animals. In Genesis the wickedness of the serpent is not expressly declared, while its superior wisdom is emphasized." Murison, 128.

⁷¹ Murison states, "In the Old Testament the serpent is almost exclusively the type of evil of some kind. In the New Testament this is intensified, and the worst name the Apocalypse can apply to the 'devil' is to call him an 'old serpent'—a name implying all evil and mischief. The only clear exception in the whole Bible is in the language of the Christ himself, who points to the serpent as a source from which disciples may learn wisdom." (p. 122)

its nature and identity suggests the question is directly expressive of the same. Having asserted the nature of the serpent part of the *to'v* associated with all Creation, its question of the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” is simply read as manifesting the truth of its natural *to'v*. There is no presumption that the serpent’s question harbors any deceptive guise, disingenuous motivation, or malicious intent. In the absence of any suggestion that an underlying trickery, deception, or corrupt motivation guides the serpent’s inquiry, we are invited to welcome the serpent’s question as motivated by genuine curiosity – perhaps from a sincere desire to discern the woman’s knowing or the content of the Divine’s instructions to humanity about the trees.

“The Tree that is in the Middle of the Garden”

Gen 3.2 The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden;

Gen 3.3 but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”

Initially, the differences between the woman’s paraphrase of God in Genesis 3.2-3 and God’s words to the man in Genesis 2.16-17 seem insignificant at best. God specifies to the man that he may eat of “every” (NRSV) or “any” (KJV) tree in the garden, while the woman has God speaking generally of the trees. There is a distinct change in the pronouns used by God, and those assigned to God by the woman: God’s singular, “you,” in Genesis 2.16-17 is transformed in the woman’s re-quoting of God to the 2nd masculine plural usage of “you,” or, to use a local colloquium, “y’all.” Further, as the woman uses “we” to count herself as part of the audience adhering to the divine instruction, she clearly demonstrates an earnest willingness, presumably unsolicited, to hold herself accountable to the same

instruction given the man. Lastly, God clearly identifies the tree-that-must-not-be-eaten by name: “tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” while the woman’s identification of the prohibited tree involves no naming and includes only a description of the tree’s location as being “in the middle of the garden.” Even so, there seems no question that the tree God and the woman each refer to are one and the same.

However, Genesis 2 reveals yet another reference to the trees in the Garden, one that is offered even earlier than Genesis 2.16-17. Genesis 2.9 describes the nature of the trees in the garden as having a two-fold goodness that makes them attractive and valued as nourishment:

Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

All trees that are planted, we are told, are done so for their ability to represent a dimension of aesthetic delight, (being “pleasant to the sight,”) and for their capacity to nourish, (being “good for food,”). But the verse offers two additional clarifications: the first locates the tree of life “in the midst of the garden,,” and the other acknowledging the presence of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is in this early passage that we first become informed that the tree of life holds the distinction of being located in the all-significant middle, or “in the midst of,” the garden.

Which Tree “in the Midst of the Garden”?

Just as the phrase “in the midst of the garden” is first used to refer to the location of the tree of life, the same phrase is used by the woman to describe the tree she believes is to

be the referenced in God's instructions to the man. (Genesis 2.17-18) Yet the tree God specifies in that passage as being the one not to be eaten by the man is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, not the tree of life. Given that the use of identical or near identical phrases within a shared narrative context is usually not considered accidental nor incidental, the narrative seems to be suggesting that the woman was referring to the tree of life, and therefore assumed it was prohibited. Having learned about the instructions for the trees secondhand, presumably from the man, it now seems quite possible the woman misunderstood which tree was being prohibited by God.

It is as if this one detail triggers a saturation point, that all-crucial precipitation point, for the ambiguity present in the narrative. Suddenly, the clear presence of ambiguity growing in the narrative, and our awareness of it, converge, and this ambiguity is not about to go away. At this juncture in the story, ambiguity in the narrative serves to raise our awareness of the vulnerability and limits inherent in Creation. But even so, it remains unclear: is it the limits of human memory, the inherent vulnerability of all efforts to communicate, or some other dimension of Creation's finitude generating the ambiguity? The narrative – as if a metaphor for the human condition highlighted by the cultural hybridity – lacks any singular clarity that might be helpful in beginning to unravel where the ambiguity began (did the man communicate God's instructions correctly to the woman? Did the woman retain what was given accurately? Did the woman ever know it was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, even if she did not identify it by name? Did the man provide the woman with the description that it was generally in the midst of the garden? And the questions go on.)

Gen 3.4 But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die...”

In declaring to the woman, “You will not die,” the good serpent asserts a claim that stands in such stark contrast to the clarity of what the woman has come to know about what God requires of humanity, albeit second-hand, through the man. What the good serpent introduces is not just another possibility, but an alternative, Other possibility whose promise of *tov*, and credible sourcing, warrant very careful consideration. And it is this presencing of the promise of an alternative *tov* that generates an epistemological ambiguity powerful enough to birth desire intense enough to cultivate the highest expression of human faithfulness.

The good serpent’s response is as startling as it is unexpected. According to traditional interpretations, the problematic serpent is making a claim here that appears to be in direct denial of what the divine has declared to the man in Genesis 2. But having earlier established the nature of the serpent as *tov*, we eliminate the interpretive possibility that the good serpent is lying to the woman or in any manner attempting to misguide her or mislead her, and reject groundless presumptions about questionable motives. The narrative gives such suggestions no leg to stand on.

Vindicating the Good Serpent

Moreover, the divine proclamation in Genesis 3.22 functions to confirm that the serpent did not mislead humanity, nor that it erred in defining the significance of the relationship between the tree of knowledge and humanity for fulfilling the truth of the good organic to each. The serpent was not wrong about the effect the tree of knowledge would have on humanity. The divine makes clear that humanity has indeed come to realize that

capacity which the serpent prophesied of. In becoming like the divine, knowing good and evil, humanity has proven the serpent's speaking to be true. The divine counsel's words וְרַע אֲרָץ טוב מִן־טוֹב לָרַעַת טוֹב⁷² confirm the truth spoken by the serpent to the woman.

Gen 3.22 Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil;

This verse, found at the other end of the narrative from our first introduction to the good serpent, is the confirmation that the good serpent's oracle is fulfilled. Addressing what has happened to the man, the Lord God confirms, “the man has become like us, knowing good and evil.” In the Hebrew, the narrative echoes the same prophetic phrased used by the good serpent in earlier in Genesis 3 with the exception of a change in subject number – from singular to plural. Echoing the serpent in Genesis 3.5, the divine acknowledges that the *tov* prescribed for humanity by the serpent is fulfilled: humanity has indeed become like the divine, knowing good and evil. This divine confirmation offers our oracular serpent the highest validation and fullest vindication: the oracle prophesied by the serpent is acknowledged as having come to pass.

Thus, as a part of the interdependent *tov* of Creation, we presume the good serpent is oriented by its nature as *tov* and seeking to realize the goodness and beauty inherent both in itself and the woman through the collaborative relationality of partnership.

Gen 3.5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

The particular manner in which *'arum* empowers the serpent's *tov* becomes clearer now as the good serpent reveals something of its function and identity. Uttering the words

“for God knows,” the good serpent shows some legs, so to speak, as the narrative offers one more clue about the remarkable creature’s function. While the good serpent nowhere suggests that its knowing of what God knows is either comprehensive or complete, the claim to know what God knows remains extraordinary, and if nothing else, is unprecedented elsewhere in the Scriptures. Thus characterized by superlative *‘arum*, the good serpent speaks confidently of what God knows, aware that the source of its knowing merits attentive consideration.

Thus, a new possibility for the nature of the good serpent’s existence emerges: there are similarities between the good serpent in Genesis 3 and ancient historical-cultural associations identifying serpents as having oracular functions. In the lineage of the mythical “oracular pythons” of ancient legend who lived, not in spaces domesticated by humanity, but in the wilderness of sacred places – it is clear that our good serpent is an oracle. Like the ancient oracle of Delphi, whose often-cryptic utterances conveyed knowledge from, and of, the divine, what was spoken was intended to transform the awareness of inquirers, or promote a transition in their being or and destiny, the untamed serpent of Genesis 3 is said to have knowledge of the divine, while inhabiting a existence that mediates understanding to humanity. The un-legislated nature of oracular beings resonates with description given of serpent as a creature of the wilderness; likewise, the mysterious nature of the serpent’s ability to speak with humanity becomes, unexpectedly, comprehensible.

When we take the serpent to be the mythical ancestor of the ancient oracles of old, the earlier description of the serpent’s knowledge as beguiling (mesmerizing), cunning (dangerous), subtle (mysterious/difficult to discern) and crafty (able to achieve desired ends) take on new significance. This is because knowledge that is God’s knowing cannot be tamed. The knowing that is God’s knowing is not domesticated; it is potent and wrapped in

mystery, and spoken through another, it emerges as dangerous, subtle and beguiling in its power to create new realities. Like the famed oracle in *The Matrix* – who speaks only that which empowers Neo to discover, and thereby authorize, his own destiny as “the One,” -- the good serpent likewise conveys to the woman the divine awareness that the nature of her *tov* – indeed, that of all humanity – is to be like God.

The mysteries spoken by oracles were always mediated, permitting, nay, insisting on a shadow of doubt: that space for creative uncertainty where the gift of agency and responsibility converge. The oracular word invited the hearer to take authority for authoring their fate because the nature of the truth spoken was always relational. The truth of what *tov* was spoken by an oracle could not be brought into existence simply because it was a divine utterance. Rather, in the radical wisdom of divine hospitality, *benevolent creation* is structure with the partnership relationality in which the truth of *tov* (a dynamic brought into existence through disclosure and concealment) cannot emerge apart from the hearer taking responsibility to exercise the agency necessary to authorize the *tov* that has been discerned or spoken, into existence.

Thus, offering the beleaguered serpent the just hospitality of perceiving its creaturely existence as a manifestation of God’s goodness (and not the evil that is the absence of divine *tov*), the inherent goodness of the serpent’s vocation, as one who is gifted with prudent knowing, emerges clearly. It becomes possible to see the serpent’s questioning of the woman, and his prophetic invitation to her, as motivated by good desires – both to fulfill his vocation to share prudent knowing, and in doing so to empower the fulfillment of humanity’s goodness?⁷³ Indeed, by correcting her apparent misinformation about the nature

⁷³ Had we unquestioningly followed the assumptions of past interpreters -- insisting

of the divine warning -- a responsibility placed upon the serpent by virtue of the privilege laid on it via its superlative epistemological receptivity -- it becomes apparent that the serpent is acting from the strength of its nature, to call forth the goodness of a knowing that brings first awareness then awakening to the woman, and through her to the man. The good serpent's faithfulness to inhabit the *tov* of its nature ultimately creates the necessary invitation for humanity to partner with that knowing which will empower their vocation to be "God-Bearers," manifesting their likeness with the Divine.

The good serpent's oracular vocation emerges only partially through the revelation that it knows what God knows. The oracular serpent's nature as servant of the Divine does not become manifest until the good serpent acts to realize the truth of its *tov*. When it faithfully mediates what it has received through divine knowing in relationship with the woman, the serpent mediates something of the divine hospitality that calls forth the *tov* of an Other into existence through partnership. Oracles, like the serpent, traditionally carried the illumination of what they have beheld -- the knowledge of what God knows -- with a practiced disregard, lest they are tempted to love the gift more than the giver. Their only destiny is to hope in anticipation of that time when they will be invited to share what they know -- knowing full well that such a gift will inaugurate the fulfillment of another's good -- or fail to, if the hearer lacks the courage of desire to exercise the agency to create. Yet apart from the hearer's intention to take responsibility for the truth that was revealed, the oracle's utterance would go forth -- but fail to complete the purpose for which it was spoken or sent. The fulfillment of an oracular experience required the courage of authoring one's destiny,

the serpent's design was to harm, tempt, deceive, corrupt, or persuade into disobedience, despite clear and confessed lack of textual evidence to supports such assumptions -- we would never have found evidence that called for delight in the serpent's confession of having knowledge of the knowledge of God.

because in the absence of taking responsibility for exercising the power of agency, the truth known by the oracle, however desirable and replete with *tov*, could not be brought into existence.⁷⁴

Which *tov*?

As previously discussed, when two paths for virtue are presented to the woman, she faces apparently conflicting perspectives. The clear credibility of both sources increases the ambiguity of her choice: her knowledge of God's instruction comes presumably from the man, who was present to receive his knowledge directly from God, and the good serpent, who declares an understanding of humanity's vocation – contradicting what the woman has learned as God's instruction – and has a knowing of what God knows. The woman shows that the desire to know ourselves faithful, in whatever limited clarity we have, compels us to seek the goodness and beauty that most draws us – even turning away from the beguiling beauty of certainty – in the hopes of knowing the fullest *tov* of God's benevolent intentions for us. The gift of the woman's desire for faithfulness makes it clearer that even as we

⁷⁴ Permitting an allegorical allusion between the serpent and the contemplative desire described by Farley, the verse exercises subtle knowledge: a truth about human experience that cannot be discerned except through understanding and taking responsibility for authoring our own desires. Seen through such an understanding of the oracular servants of the divine, Farley's contemplative *eros* emerges as confirming the challenging truth testified of by the mystics: until we who ask to know and see are purified by suffering-long and persistently with desire, we will not be able to perceive truth that does not come through the assent of others; while thereafter, we will not be concerned whether what is known is assented by another or not. Then, to have knowledge of what God knows comes only through a mystical union with God when, by desire, we are drawn to contemplation. Contemplatives through the ages have borne witness: theirs is the work of fearless abandonment, offering up what they know for what they do not yet have hold. Then, purified by desire, theirs is the reward of a knowing they have labored in an eternity of silence to wait on. Once found, these who have bathed in the presence of God, cannot return the same.

recognize the limits to the limits of ambiguity, neither clarity nor the lack thereof, can hinder the restlessness of our desire to experience the fullest truth of the divine likeness imprinted in us.

Seeing the Good

Gen 3.6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

The woman faces her choices. She has already internalized the commands for herself, as is evidenced in her use of the plural pronouns – “we” and “y’all” – to include herself in the listening audience. The first option invites her to eat of “any” or “every” tree in the garden, while avoiding one that is clearly warned against as a matter of life or dying. Mediated by the man’s recounting of God’s instructions to him and only him (the woman was not yet introduced to Creation at the time), the woman stands on solid ground if she chooses to continue complying with divine command given to the man.

However, the oracular serpent presents testimony of another *tov* available to her: with the accompanying assurance that the experience of dying does not accompany eating of the tree that gives knowing of good and evil. The choice to use “knowing” over “knowledge” to describe the experiential awareness mediated by the tree is intentional. In our interpretation, truth is not merely a theoretical, informational or descriptive grasp of data as suggested by “knowledge,” but rather an embodied, experiential awareness of things as they are. Most significantly, the narrative makes clear that what the oracle prophesies concerns the woman’s vocational integrity. Eating of the fruit will not only open her eyes, but in the *tov* of that awareness, the woman will become like God.

Harkening back to Genesis 1.26, it is made clear that humanity is created by God with the intention of bearing the image of God. The Lord God intends for humanity to manifest the very likeness of the Divine:

Gen 1.26 Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness...."

The transformative truth offered by the good serpent invites the woman to recognize her potential partnership with the tree as she acts to discern the capacity of tree to empower the greater fullness of her *toḅ*. What is at stake in the woman's decision to eat of the tree is the fulfillment of her vocational destiny. She will either eat and become like God or she will not eat, and thereby fail to fulfill that vocation for which Genesis 1.26 makes clear humanity was made: to bear the likeness of God. This beguiling truth is presented to the woman with the intent of empowering her consideration and, eventually, the decision that will fulfill the potential *toḅ* of knowing good and evil organic to the woman.

But the oracular serpent can only speak the promise of *toḅ* inherent in the woman's decision as an invitation to become herself. Whether she chooses to realize the truth of who she can be is actually a choice the woman has the awareness to make.

Genesis 3.5 "for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."⁴

The serpent's claim must have been arresting to the woman. If eating of the tree would open her eyes and make her like God then, conversely, her refusal to eat of the same tree would result in her inability to manifest the likeness of the One whose likeness she was created to bear. Further, the serpent's warning implies that failure to eat of the tree will result in the deprivation of a knowing (of good and evil) intended to equip humanity with a

necessary consciousness – “and your eyes will be opened.” A crippling thought. Given all conveyed to be at stake by a warning stamped with an unparalleled claim to divine endorsement “for God knows,” eating of the tree must be taken, at a minimum, as creating a necessary evil for the woman to contemplate.

In light of the oracular insight presented to her, combined with the past instruction given by God to the man when she was not present, the woman faces the responsibility of discerning the better of the two virtues. Though it is promised in the wake of the woman coming to awareness, there is no indication that the knowing of good and evil is anything so clearly desirable. It is possible that the very pairing of good with evil suggests that ambivalence might be an appropriate response to such a knowing. What is revealed in Genesis 3.6 is that the woman is willing to take responsibility for the decision before her. If she is torn by the alternative paths set before her, the first choice she makes sets her intention to discern the truth of the tree’s virtue for herself. And in this the woman teaches us the meaning of imitating God.

The woman is described as seeing the tree, attending to it with an attentiveness that empowers her perceiving. The nuance of the verb *ra’ab* echoes that of the *ra’ab*, or seeing, practiced by the Lord God in Genesis 1, when he “saw that it was good.” In like fashion, the narrative tells us that the woman “saw” a threefold-goodness in the tree. The Hebrew usage of the verbs in this verse are remarked upon because they bear a resemblance to the very description offered of the trees in Genesis 2.9 that we have previously examined, but with notable exceptions.

The first exception is that a third form of goodness, the capacity to make wise, is evident in the tree being discussed, and the other exception being the presence of verb conjugations unique to Genesis 3.6 that give the verse new meanings. According to one

commentator, the phrases in 3.6 borrowed from Genesis 2.9 have new meanings assigned that actually represent an intensification and augmentation of the original goodness presented by the trees in the garden:

Repeated here, in somewhat altered form, the expressions employed above (Genesis 2.9) in connection with the trees of the garden generally, the Bible appears to give these phrases meaning that are, to some extent, new and different. The woman noted that the tree was good for food, that is, that it was not only a pleasant flavour (perhaps she was able to judge the taste by the fragrance), but also and particularly, that it was good to eat, because the eating thereof raised on to an 'Elohim-like plane. And that it was a delight to the eyes: not only by virtue of its beauty, which charmed the eye, but also, and more especially, because through eating it the eyes were opened (your eyes will be opened, we read in the previous verse). And that the tree was to be desired to make one wise: not just נְהַמַּדָּה *nehamadh* ['pleasant'] in the sense that by eating of it one acquired discernment and knowledge.⁵

After offering a nuanced exegesis of the verse, Cassuto's interpretive decision is to assign the verse the function of bearing witness to the woman's reprehensible propensity for delusions of grandeur. Implicitly, Cassuto assigns the verse of functioning as an indictment of the woman for the flaw he is so keen to assign her: deceived imagining. His argument that the description of goodness attributed to the trees represents merely the wildly imaginative exaggeration generated by deception in the woman is flawed on several levels.

Yet contrary to Cassuto's suggestion that the verse describes the woman as wild with exaggerated imagining, blinded to truth by self-deceiving, and thoughtless with selfish impulsivity (to snatch the fruit) - the actual length and quality of detail that the narrative commits to describing the woman's "seeing" offers compelling and transformative discernment. First, the text makes no indication that there is any narrative disagreement with the validity of the woman's findings in Genesis 3.6. There is no challenge to the soundness of the woman's discernment to be found anywhere in the chapter. The Genesis 3:6

description of how the woman finds the trees -- they are “pleasant to the sight and good for food” – is corroborated inter-textually by of original description of the trees in the garden given earlier in Genesis 2. Genesis 2.19 confirms that the woman accurately grasps the particular characteristics of *tov* originally ascribed to all the trees in the garden, including the tree of knowledge.⁷⁵

Cassuto’s argument that the new verb conjugations introduced in Genesis 3.6 convey a unique intensification of the goodness, his exegetical analysis provides further basis for the argument that the woman accurately perceives the nature and value of the *tov* organic to the tree of knowledge.⁷⁶ Recognizing that the verse provides a description of the woman’s actual (not imagined) experience, I argue that the verse is describing concrete *new realities* that actually emerge in response to the divine-like hospitality practiced by the woman’s seeing. In the woman’s attentiveness to the *tov* presented, the hospitality of her seeing goes beyond allowing her to perceive the tree’s *tov*. The verb tenses used indicate that the woman’s practice of “seeing the good” calls forth an intensification, or magnification the *tov* latent in the tree. Thus the hospitality of the woman’s seeing emerges as a *praxis of beauty*. Understood as manifesting the openness of hospitality to the *tov* of the Other in Creation, Genesis 3 conceptualizes the woman’s *praxis of beauty* as manifesting *erotic faithfulness*. The woman enacts a faithful expression of relational partnership that inaugurates the fulfillment

⁷⁵ Gen. 2:9 Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (NRSV)

⁷⁶ While establishing the exegetical meaning of the verse to be so, Cassuto transforms the significance of the verse by rendering an interpretation that claims: whatever intensification of goodness is depicted by verse, it is merely the result of the woman’s delusional imaginings. Therefore, he insists, the intensification of the goodness depicted by the verse is not something to be taken at face value. This interpretation appears to offer little more than a window into the unruliness of Cassuto’s own misogynistic imaginings.

of the richest *tov* possible for her and the tree.

Yet not until she embraces the partnership with the tree – by eating of its fruit – does the *tov* latent in the tree blossom to manifest the truth of a greater *tov* beyond its own existence. It is important to note that the *tov* which becomes manifest is not limited to the tree. Rather, the partnership needed to activate the *tov* that is potent between the tree and the woman suggests the intensification of *tov* to involve a magnification or expansion of how *tov* is manifest. If the tree activates the capacities of *tov* organic to the woman – the same expressions of *tov* remain inactivate until she embraces partnership with the tree.

But once in relationship, the tree helps fulfill the *tov* particular to the woman's nature: her potential to be nourished, her potential to be wise, and her capacity to delight in that which is pleasant, to enjoy the delightful. The interdependence that marks this partnership of appreciation -- otherwise described as "delighting in" -- functions to "show forth" the particular *aletheia* specific to the relationship between woman and the tree. Finally, this intensification of *tov* interpreted as showing forth a new reality of goodness and beauty, offers the discernment that the intensification of *tov* simply cannot occur in isolation: the gift of partnership brings out the fullest manifestation of *tov*.

Second, given that the verse describes the woman as taking and eating the fruit of the tree immediately following her perception of the tree's three-fold goodness, and because we persist in the presumption of *benevolent creation* -- that all creation is oriented towards the fulfillment of the *tov* most organic to it -- the narrative can be read as suggesting that the woman's decision to eat of the fruit (and her subsequent decision to share it) stems from desire and appreciation for the tree's unique ability to call forth her own becoming/the fulfillment of the *tov* organic to her being. The straightforward clarity of this narrative implication -- that the woman is motivated by appreciative desire for the new forms of *tov*

presented to her in the tree -- begs the question: what is the narrative basis for traditional interpretations that conjecture disobedient rejection of divine authority, misguided mistrust of divine intention, and variations of concupiscent greed or the sheer hubris of rebellion against the divine, motivate humanity's decision to eat of the tree of knowledge? The narrative harbors no suggestion of divine condemnation against the desire that prompts woman's decision to eat (and then to share what she eats with the man).

A third insight from Genesis 3.5-6 recognizes: the woman's act of contemplating the tree represents her critical decision to take responsibility for empowering the emergence of the *tov* organic to her, through appreciative partnership with Creation. The woman is not merely content discerning the highest *tov* from the options presented to her – if that were the case, perhaps the narrative would have ended with a vindication of the serpent, skipped to Genesis 3.22, and ended with her reporting to the man that he got it wrong and applauding the serpent for being right. But mere correctness is not the kind of *aletheia* the narrative is concerned with, nor has hunting for whom to blame ever been the story of Genesis 3. Rather the narrative makes very clear: the point of the story revolves around co-creation as the woman clearly embraces the responsibility and power given to her to act in accordance with the desire awakened in her by a new knowledge of beauty and goodness in the tree.

Alerted to the singular importance of the tree of knowledge for realizing the *aletheia* of her existence, the woman acts, laudably, taking responsibility for discerning the truth of the serpent's oracle herself. She does not capitulate her responsibility for knowing the truth of her being to another. She does not act fearfully to secure her confidence by a second-hand knowledge of divine instruction gleaned from the man who was instructed by God, nor does she uncritically accept the prophetic insight of an oracular serpent who knows what God knows. She neither denies her own agency, nor allows her empowerment to be

mediated by the authority of another. And when her woman's contemplative consideration⁷⁷ of the tree yields the clarity that her highest *tov* emerges in partnership with the tree, we see the woman acting from faithfulness to her desire for the divine, to seek the highest and fullest *tov* of her being.

The Woman's Faithfulness: A Praxis of Beauty

Genesis 3.6 offers a description of the woman engaged in the hospitality of "seeing the good," in Creation. It is the same kind of attentive perceiving ascribed to God in Genesis 1, when God seeing the goodness in creation, delights in it. The woman's God-like attentiveness to the tree empowers not only her awareness of the three-fold *tov* of the tree (good for food, comely to the eyes, but also needed for making wise) but introduces something more. The woman further imitates God by choosing to delight in the goodness that she perceives in the tree. By "delighting" I mean to describe the choice to engage in a relationship towards the goodness perceived in that manner deemed both appreciative and appropriate to her nature, and to that of the tree. In this case, we are told the woman eats of the fruit of the tree in a decision that allows the potential *tov* that she has discerned in the tree to be released into her body to enact or effect the woman with its goodness.

The woman does not rub up against the bark of the tree, urinate against it to mark the tree as territory, or bear holes into the trunk to make a home. Rather, in choosing to eat the fruit of the tree, the woman chooses to partner with the tree in the way most appropriate to her existence as human. In doing so, the woman invites the opening of a relational space of hospitality – a relationship – between herself and the tree that empowers the emergence

⁷⁷ The use of "contemplative" here carries the connotation of contemplative desire for God described in Wendy Farley's work on contemplative *eros* in *Wounding and Healing of Desire*.

of new realities of goodness that would otherwise remain only potential, latent in the tree. The woman's practice of seeing the *tov* in Creation is understood in this interpretation as her *praxis of beauty*. The term describes the human imitation of the divine practice of relational hospitality enacted by God in Genesis 1.

In the woman's desire to enjoy the tree, her relational affirmation of its goodness creates the hospitable reality in which the tree is able to manifest the God-likeness, through the woman, uniquely particular to its *tov*. In relationship with the woman, the tree is able to fulfill its nature as fruit-bearing, while mutually edifying for the woman, she enjoys her nature as fruit-eating. Hence, the woman's practice of "seeing" (which perceives goodness in Creation) and subsequent delighting in (engaging from desire for appropriate relationship with goodness) is recognized as imitating God in the God-like practice/divine activity of relational hospitality that invites and facilitates the fulfillment of the *tov* emergent in that relationship. It is the woman's seeing the goodness of creation and relating to it in delight that allows the goodness in creation to blossom – be fulfilled – as if goodness is not fulfilled until relationship with the Divine, or the divine activity of seeing and delighting in the good, activates and actualizes potential *tov* into existence.

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

Gen 3.7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Humanity's eyes are opened. We find nothing in the text to challenge the presumption that humanity has indeed "become like God, knowing good and evil." Nothing

in the narrative denies the truth of what the good serpent has foreseen or debates whether the serpent's oracle has come to pass. Indeed, Genesis 3.22 expresses divine affirmation that the oracular serpent spoke truth. The narrative gives us no cause to doubt: what the oracular serpent foresaw for humanity has come to pass. Presuming, then, that humanity's potential to know good and evil has been activated, it is reasonable to assume the opening of the eyes, or awakening of perception is the result of humanity having consummated its partnership with the tree of knowledge.

The clarity of our prior knowing that humanity's nakedness is neither new, nor cause for humanity's shame -- Genesis 2.25 tells us that man and the woman were naked together, and were not ashamed -- we take it now, in Genesis 3, to represent a feature that is natural and organic to the goodness and beauty of humanity's existence. Because nakedness emerges as a dimension of *tov* original to humanity's existence, we presume it to have been accounted for when the goodness and beauty of the Created order is first proclaimed (the perfection of seven times) *tov* by God. And participating in a benevolent creation, the *tov* of nakedness gives no rise to, nor cause for, shame. It makes little if any sense, therefore, that past interpretations conclude that humanity's decision to cover up with fig leaves is associated with the shameful self-consciousness of guilt. Yet how is an association between nakedness and the presumption of shame established when nakedness was never previously stigmatized or recognized as anything less than a dimension of humanity's *tov*? With no mention of humanity being ashamed in the Genesis 2-3 narratives, there is little merit or textual support for interpretations that insist the desire to cover-up and the effort to hide from God were energized by the shame of nudity or guilt over disobedience.

An Awareness of Vulnerability

Because Genesis 2.25 makes it clear that nakedness is no ground for shame, when Genesis 3.17 introduces humanity's nakedness again, the conviction of benevolent creation maintain that it is an expression of *tov* original to human existence. As such, nakedness manifests a goodness and beauty organic to human existence. This fundamental recognition of nakedness as *tov* is critical for understanding what constitutes the knowledge of good and evil that humanity awakens to.

Interpretations intent on supporting the notion of humanity's Fall generally introduced a sharp divide between the significance of humanity's nakedness before the Fall and after the mythic Fall. Nakedness is not deemed shameful before the Fall, but after the disobedience, when humanity becomes aware of its nakedness, the act of covering-up and hiding from God is taken to bear sure and certain witness of humanity's new found shame and guilt. However, in contemplating the act of sewing fig leaves together to make loincloths, we do not presume that the act of covering up represents a departure from the original conviction that humanity's nakedness is *tov*. Nor does the text suggest that the awareness of nakedness in any way converts humanity's experience so that it now brings shame.

Rather, given the lack of negative emotional associations in the verse indicating humanity's awareness of its nakedness, I propose it was a desire to protect themselves, not *from* their nakedness (again, because any comment on shame is clearly omitted in the text), but because *their nakedness makes them vulnerable* that motivates humanity to cover up...and later, as if to confirm the goodness of this response, God replaces their temporary loincloths with the less-vulnerable protection of with animal skins for their most vulnerable parts.

Yet, metaphorically, this constitutes the knowledge of good and evil as humanity experiences it as having one's eyes opened. Significantly, the way Genesis 3 depicts this

dynamic of coming to awareness has a quality of awakening to it as what is brought to conscious perception is a prior existing condition of existence, i.e. nakedness. Knowledge of good and evil, therefore, can be understood as that which emerges, initially, as that fundamental awareness of what is *tov* – i.e. the condition of nakedness – that further expands to invite a corresponding awareness of *tov*'s vulnerability. In this way, Genesis 3 can be understood to be establishing that a “knowing of good,” or *tov*, functions as the necessary precondition and foundational awareness of *tov*, that inspires a subsequent awareness of that *tov*'s corollary vulnerability, to emerge as a “knowing...evil.”

This verse establishes a firm epistemological relationship between our knowing of *tov* and the concern for the vulnerability of the same *tov* in positing the narrative's epistemological perspective. When humanity's eyes are opened, it is the consciousness of their nakedness that inspires them to cover themselves with fig leaves. Nakedness is taken to express something of humanity's *tov* -- that which is good and beautiful about humanity -- and humanity acting to cover the *tov* of nakedness reveals their wisdom in response to the knowing of evil. It is not the case that nakedness is evil, nor that the protective covering up of nakedness is evil, but rather that nature of knowing evil resides in the awareness of vulnerability engendered in their nakedness. The knowing of evil that emerges around humanity's nakedness is a relational experience of awakening to the vulnerability of that *tov*. The consciousness of being naked mediates humanity's fear of vulnerability and inspires the man and the woman to cover themselves. Knowing the vulnerability of their nakedness is what constitutes humanity's knowing of evil. And it inspires their desire to protect themselves from the vulnerability of exposure rendered by their nakedness. Yet the text is clear: it is *not* their nakedness which is evil, nor their covering up, which is deemed evil. They cover themselves from a protectiveness of the *tov* of their nakedness, not from a

shameful dislike of their condition. Here again, it is important to remember: the *toṽ* of nakedness is earlier explicitly declared (Genesis 2) as giving humanity no cause for shame, thus what constitutes a knowing of good and evil cannot be misunderstood to represent a change in the original nature of nakedness as *toṽ*. Rather, an awareness of the vulnerability of *toṽ* – and that *toṽ* is vulnerable enough to require protective covering – is what emerges as the knowledge of evil.

Thus, Genesis 3 teaches that the knowing of good and evil is in fact that poignant and powerful consciousness of the very vulnerabilities that can be suffered by (the loss of) that which is *toṽ*. As a knowing of good, the truth of *toṽ* likewise mediates an awareness or consciousness of our vulnerability to the very loss of that which we deem beautiful and good. In this lies the heart of what constitutes the knowing of good and evil in Genesis 3: as we grow aware of that which is *toṽ* in our existence – in the case of first humanity, a conscious awareness or knowing of their nakedness – this precipitates a corollary knowing of evil, that conscious awareness of the very vulnerability mediated by some sense of fear that what is *toṽ* will be harmed or otherwise lost. The *toṽ* of humanity's nakedness in Genesis 3 is a knowing of *toṽ* that inspires their knowing of evil as the vulnerability of nakedness inspires humanity to protect and cover their nakedness.

This point is readily grasped by parents in our earliest experiences of holding the babies we have given life to. In my case, both my young sons' infancies empowered this poignant recognition of vulnerability mediated by that which was utterly good and beautiful. The knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3 describes that consciousness that the very goodness and beauty we know by experience triggers powerful fears, as the very fact of the goodness necessarily introduces anxieties and fears around the potential loss of such precious goodness and beauty in our lives. Finally, the nature of knowing good and evil

drawn from this description is a relational experience of *tov* that triggers awareness of vulnerability. The preciousness of the good might inspire a dread or fear of losing or having harm done to that particular *tov*.

When humanity's eyes are opened and they know that they are naked, the knowing of good emerges fundamentally as an awareness of reality qua reality, a cognizance of things as the really are. Thus, the discovery of their nakedness is not an introduction of something that is new or novel – it is rather an awakening of cognizance to the state of things as they are, or perhaps were, even before perception. Understood thus, nakedness, as perceived through an epistemological framework, is an ontological knowing – knowledge of reality as it really is. And when interpreted through a Farleyan understanding of contemplative desire, Genesis 3.6-7 reveals that contemplation, when taken as praxis of *Eros* or desire, yields the consciousness of a profoundly necessary understanding of the nature of reality as capable of stimulating that relentless restlessness that Augustine held must remain, “restless until we find our rest in Thee.”

Given the knowing is both of good and evil, there is a distinct connotation of wholeness associated with this God-likeness. Knowing good is an appreciation of the truth of that beauty and goodness particular to the nature of what is experienced as *tov*; yet the knowing of this *tov* is completed through a knowing that may rightly be deemed “evil” because it is a corresponding and unshakable awareness of our own suffering that grows as we reckon with the potential vulnerability inherent in the very preciousness of the *tov*. The implications of understanding evil as that suffering experienced when we encounter the vulnerability inextricably linked with our profoundest appreciation of the good and beautiful in existence can be profoundly disturbing. In this paradigm, knowing evil is inextricably linked to our knowing of all that is *tov*. We are bid to realize how the struggle of

suffering and the loss of grief are experiences as organic to the structure of existence as are our experiences of *tov*. Still more, knowing good offers us the troubling clarity that it is our very consciousness of the preciousness and value of *tov* that guarantees we are unable to escape encountering vulnerability in finitude.

This recognition -- that our very awareness and appreciation of the truth of goodness and beauty we find in Creation ushers in commensurate experiences of vulnerability that beget the knowing of evil -- nuances theological arguments that interpret human suffering as resulting from the evil of sin with the alternative clarity that it is human desire to be faithful to the highest *tov* that occasions the introduction of the suffering in human experience that constitutes evil. Reminiscent of Augustine's insight about the nature of evil in his *Confessions*, evil in this Genesis 3 conceptualization of knowing of good and evil emerges as a lack or absence of the good. Furthermore, the relational nature of knowing good and evil affirms the recognition that "sin" expresses a relational dynamic of fear and distrust that seeks to secure ourselves against the loss of *tov*. Resonant with Edward Farley's conceptualization of idolatry, sin emerges as a habit of forgetfulness that forgets the truth that all *tov* in existence - including ourselves - remain the benevolent, but necessarily finite, reminders of Divine Love whose hospitality allows us to discover that our blessedness in God transcends even our ability to secure what is *tov*.

Thus, the experiences of the built-in obsolescence that come to characterize all experiences of *tov* in Creation emerge as anything but the accidents of flawed design. In this way, Genesis 3 reveals how the awareness of the enduring vulnerability that marks our experiences of *tov* in finitude nevertheless enables the transformative experience of blessedness as God invites the conscious and responsible partnership of a faithful humanity in co-creating to fulfill our highest *tov* as "God-bearers."

An Accounting

Gen 3.8 ¶ They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

The man and the woman hide themselves when they hear the sound of the Lord in the garden. Many a commentator has noted the sense of closeness and nuance of intimate familiarity suggested between humanity and God by the tone of this verse. Humanity, having been inaugurated into a knowing of good and evil, is now fully aware of its vulnerability. The quality of vulnerability humanity suffers is indicated by the narrative's description of how the powerful presence of the Lord walking amid the arboretum affects the man and woman. Missing their presence, the Lord God, seeks out the man:

Gen 3.9 But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, "Where are you?"

In the first words the man is permitted, the narrative allows him to offer a response rich with substance and self-awareness as he gives an accounting of his decision to hide himself. Faced with a multiplicity of competing goods – the good of adhering to God's commandment, the good of following his desire for the *tov* shared by the serpent, the good of partnering with the woman, his *'ezer kenegdo*, in realizing the fullness of his vocation to be a God-bearer – the man demonstrates the truth of fear that concerns us when we know that the good we have chosen, even if our highest and best good, nevertheless entails the disappointment of loss or the frustration of *tov* that cannot be embraced.

When humanity chooses to act upon their desire for the *to'v* promised in the fruit, that decision to honor another source of authority introduces the fear of uncertainty, that questions whether the other authority, in this case the Lord God, will be disappointed or angry.⁷⁸ But in the integrity of his innocence, and his trust of the Divine, the man does not need to hide his fearful concern at disappointing God. The trust of intimacy is evident throughout in the frankness and open, confessional quality of his words. "I heard you...I was afraid...I was naked. I hid myself." It cannot be said that there is either duplicity or hidden-ness in the description the man gives of his actions and how they came to be motivated.

Gen 3.10 He said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself."

Gen 3.11 He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?"

What first concerns God is the matter of how the man has become aware of his nakedness. And supplying the answer, God inquires if the man has eaten of the tree that God had instructed the man not to eat from. There is a marked interconnectedness in the structure of relationality incorporated into the man's answer:

Gen 3.12 The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate."

The man does not equivocate, as if to compromise the truth in his answer. Yet the man's words are structured in reverse order of accountability, emphasizing that the man sees his action as corollary to, or dependent upon, the initiatives taken by others. God is cited

⁷⁸ My thanks to Professor Bea Wallins of Hebrew Union College-JIR, her 2nd year rabbinical students, for their engagement of my work, with particular thanks to Joshua D. Knobel, who provided this insight into our interpretation of the text. HUC-JIR (Los Angeles), April 12, 2010.

first as the one providing the woman for him. Then he identifies the woman as the agent who give him the fruit from the tree...and only after establishing the precipitant made by God and the woman, does the man own his decision, albeit it passively: he is the recipient who ate what was given to him.

Highlighted by his not-quite-so-subtle reordering of responsibility, the man is clearly invested in emphasizing the connectedness between his actions to the partnerships that primarily shape his relationship to Creation and himself. And yet, following the dynamic of consciousness discerned earlier in the epistemological pattern depicted as knowing good and evil, the *to'v* of interconnectedness so valued by the man reflexively suggests he is concerned to downplay any independent agency that might be associated with his decision. The possibility that the man is unwilling to own his agency in making a decision that has awakened his awareness about the vulnerability of his own *to'v* emerges distinctly as the man signifies a direct association between his decision and God's original decision to partner him with the support of a wife who would offer him the fruit he ate. And the man's trust in the hospitality of the divine is not unfounded.

It should be remembered that humanity's consciousness has been transformed in eating of the tree of knowledge. They possess a new ontological awareness about how the nature of *to'v* has corresponding vulnerabilities, and this must be retained as an interpretive lens in understanding how the narrative depicts humanity as responding to themselves, God, and the rest of creation. Thus, when the woman is questioned by God as to what she has done, her answer reveals an unexpectedly minimalist and negative framing of her transformative interactions with the serpent:

Gen 3.13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent tricked me, and I ate."

Answering God, the woman offers the brevity of a single reason why she has done what she has done, in contrast to the man's detailed accounting. The response is unlike any of the woman's previous responses in the narrative. In contrast to the thorough, nuanced, and even quoted recounting she gives earlier of her understanding of God's words, the woman mentions nothing of the content of her conversation with the serpent to God. Indeed, not only is she silent on the matter of the remarkable *to'v* of the tree that she discerned, but she uncharacteristically assigns responsibility to another, not for her decision, but for the authority that inspired her decision, "the serpent tricked me." The use of the *hifil* tense for tricked clearly indicates that the woman sees the serpent as having been the *caused*. It should be noted here that nothing is said that maligns either the character or nature of the serpent as good. Yet without denying responsibility and agency in her decision to eat of the tree, the woman's comment indicates there is a gap between her experience and her expectations, as informed by the serpent. While acknowledging the serpent had influence in her choice, the woman does not suggest anything other than that the decision to eat was hers, "and I ate." Like the man, the woman represents her eating as a decision made in relationship with another – the serpent – whom she indicates was sufficiently authoritative for her that she has made a decision as a result of accepting her influence by the serpent.

Imbedded in the belief that the serpent acted to trick the woman is the suggestion of misrepresentation on the part of the serpent, and the woman's subsequent disappointment with the outcome. Whatever the cause of disappointment, it relates to the experience of coming to know good and evil, so perhaps is the intimidating experience of recognizing the vulnerability inherent in their nakedness? Knowing good and evil results in the human couple covering themselves, and later hiding from the Divine in fear – it is clear the woman

and man have become intensely cognizant of their vulnerability – perhaps nothing like the experience they associated with the description of becoming “like God.” Indeed, based on the initial experience of knowing good and evil as described in Genesis 3, becoming like God does not appear to be one of empowerment for humanity.⁷⁹ Rather, the increased awareness of fragility, vulnerability, and need for humanity’s protection around their nakedness -- perhaps not the first experiences one would associate with manifesting God “likeness”! – proves sufficiently threatening: subsequently, even the presence of God walking among the trees in the garden is disorienting enough to frighten humanity into hiding.

“Multiple misfortunes that take place one after the other can leave us feeling vulnerable and intensely cognizant of our fragility.”⁸⁰

The Consequences

Gen 3.14 The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

If we next expect the Lord God to inquire after the good serpent’s rendition of its role in the matter of humanity’s awakening, the narrative offers no such justice. When the Lord God addresses the serpent – that creature of the wilderness epitomizing the

⁷⁹ Intriguingly the woman remains silent with regards to the matter of her role in the man eating of tree – she neither owns the blame suggested in God’s question, “What have you done?” as if she is the one responsible for the man eating the fruit, nor refutes the man’s contention, “the woman...gave me...and I ate,” as if to deny her gift to the man. Her silence increases the ambiguity of the narrative. The woman’s response differentiates her experience and concern from that of the man’s or God’s.

⁸⁰ Anon.

epistemological virtue of prudence – it is with a pronouncement of responsibility, and the declaration that the serpent is cursed for having “done this.”

Yet what is the “this” that the serpent has done? The narrative does not support traditional interpretations that presume the serpent is condemned for deceiving humanity.⁸¹ The man does not die from eating the fruit; it will be more than 900 years before Adam passes, and that will be after siring many children with Eve. Moreover, the Lord God confirms that the man has indeed become like God, knowing good and evil, vindicating the accuracy of the serpent’s oracular pronouncement. The woman’s description of the serpent tricking her remains un-validated by the narrative, even as the Lord God describes the serpent as being “cursed.” (So what alternative connotations are inherent in meanings of Hebrew word for tricked, other than suggestion of having duped? i.e. trickster who empowers new being?)

This is the first appearance of the word “cursed” in the narrative. No prior usage of it in Genesis 1 or 2 supplies a pre-existing context that might otherwise help conceptualize the word’s usage here. Still the verse itself lacks no insight for our conceptualization of the meaning of cursed in this context. First, the serpent will experience its cursedness as an experience that distinguishes it from the rest of animal kind. Whereas previously the serpent is associated with the beasts of the field which it was deemed to be the most prudent – the nature of its cursedness makes manifest the manner in which it is unlike all the animals, not just those sharing the wilderness with it.

Genesis 3.14b...upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.

⁸¹ Mentioned previously, Genesis 3.22 vindicates the serpent’s oracular accuracy when the Lord God confirms humanity does, as the serpent prophesied, “become like God.”

Second, the serpent is told it will be upon its belly. While some commentators have insisted this verse connotes a change in physiological nature of the snake's existence, the preceding segment of Genesis 3.14 can be taken to suggest it is a relational change in status that is lived out in the snake's stature among its peers.⁸² And the evidence that the nature of the changes to affect the serpent are social and even economical, continue to appear in the following verse.

The Cursedness of Enmity

Gen 3.15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Stanley Rosenbaum makes the nuanced argument that the term for “enmity” is used distinctively in the Hebrew scriptures to express the tribal concern for competition over territory and power over land, rather than any kind of personal or professional hatred.⁸³ The nuance of competition is particularly appropriate when you consider the importance of securing land for ancient nomadic tribes. In a similar way, it is clear that the divine is describing the introduction of a competition for sovereignty destined to prevent the continued partnership between the serpent and the woman. Perhaps involving the divine command to subdue the earth and have dominion over all the animals, Genesis 1.25-27, the clarity that this competition will result in conflict that is enduring for generations, “between

⁸² There is a balance in the description of what will happen in the conflict between humanity and serpent-kind hereafter: the serpent is not left to be bashed by humanity, but it is clearly inscribed as having the ability to return attack, appropriate of the mode of mobility appointed for the serpent, striking the heel of humanity.

⁸³ Rosenbaum's example of Saul being described as loving David, but having sufficient enmity to attempt to kill him in light of the threat David represented to Saul's son, Jonathan, ascending to leadership, offers a particularly clear example of enmity shaping a battle for territorial competition.

your offspring and hers,” is softened only by the unusual equity in the potential violence to be exchanged between the serpent’s offspring with the woman’s offspring: humanity will strike from the position of authority, the serpent’s head; but with compelling poetic justice, the serpent will, from its strategic position, be able to strike humanity’s sense of safety or security from the vulnerability of the heel.

The Nature of Curse: Facing Finitude

Having earlier discerned that the knowledge of good and evil is a consciousness of the vulnerabilities organically inherent in every expression of *toṽ*, now we recognize that curse appears to name a condition of vulnerability that emerges as various expressions of *toṽ* come into relationship with each other, influenced by the finite limits and boundaries essential to, and fundamentally ordering all Creation. Thus, in Genesis 3 we see that curse becomes visible as different expressions of *toṽ* come into relationship with each other. As such, curse is a condition expressing relational tension – though the tension is not necessarily one that must or can or should be resolved. Instead, cursedness comes to mediate a valuable awareness of interconnectedness that can function edifyingly. Interestingly, while relationships manifesting cursedness may challenge our conviction of blessedness, the condition of cursedness also mediates awareness of the inescapable interdependence natural to the majority of our relationships. The condition of cursedness offers us the opportunity to come face to face, more consciously, with those fears that concern the inescapable contingencies of finitude that shape our existence and navigate a greater harmony with them. The condition of curse allows us to work out the truth of how we handle suffering in the face of the suffering Other, and rather than offering the false hope of a struggle-free

existence, empowers us to discover the enduring hope of blessedness even in and through the limits we experience in our interdependence with the rest of Creation.

It is through the gift of cursedness that we encounter many aspects of ourselves that we have experienced and judged as inadequate, and have the opportunity to confront responses to our feelings of frustration, failure, and self-condemnation that allow for the possibility to notice our fears and doubts. Acknowledging and accepting our doubts and fears is a healing practice – the bringing of our shadow parts of ourselves “into the light,” so to speak – that allows us to become more fully integrated through a wholeness of self-understanding. Cursedness, as a vision of relational existence, not only raises awareness of the finitude structuring all Creation, but makes unquestionably clear that the well-being of one is tied up with another – in this way, radical finitude and radical interdependence mediate how the support of each effectively constitutes the thriving of all.

The Provision of Tesbuqa

Gen 3.16 To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire (*tesbuqa*) shall be for your husband, and he shall rule (*mashal*) over (*bet*) you.”

The key to understanding this passage lies in the foundational recognition: God does not curse the woman. What the woman is told by the Lord God is that she will experience an *intensification* of (*itzavon*)⁸⁴ her toil and pain in *heron* conception and pregnancy, and an *increase* of pain in (*tel'di*, root *ylal*) laboring or bringing forth children. Because the Hebrew

⁸⁴ *itzavon* is a masculine noun meaning pain and sadness, but is modified by a 2nd person feminine singular pronominal suffix, meaning “your” pain and sadness referring to the woman.

conjunctions of the verbs translated “childbearing,” and “bring forth” indicate an intensification of those experiences, rather than their introduction, the text clearly presumes that physical pain and the labor of toil are *already* part of the woman’s experience of pregnancy and child-bearing. Nothing new is initiated; what is already a part of existence is intensified. This same clarity is embedded in Genesis 3.17 as it describes the intensification of the toil and struggle that the man will experience in his relationship to tilling the ground. That the struggle of toil and physical pain ascribed to the woman’s pregnancy and child-bearing, and associated with the man’s experience of tilling the ground, are *already original* to humanity’s experience prior to their intensification, empowers several theological clarities that reveal the nature of understanding of the narrative.

The awareness that physical pain and struggle is inherently a part of Creation before humanity eats of the tree of knowledge offers theologically significant implications. Acknowledging that the presence of physical pain and the struggle of toil is natural and organic to the *toiv* of Creation offers the assurance that physical pain and the struggle of toil are somehow express the *toiv* that constitutes a *benevolent creation*. Consequently, the particular experiences of pain and struggle described in Genesis 3.16, and 17 cannot be taken as evidence of divine displeasure or punishment. The physical pain associated with pregnancy and laboring to give birth, and toiling to till and bring forth fruit from the ground, become experiences inherently imbued with the capacity to mediate God’s gracious hospitality. Such an interpretation of the text empowers several critical theological clarities. In pregnancy and laboring, physical pain and the toil of struggle offer divine assurance of presence of *toiv*. Universally identified as the body’s gift of warning, pain in pregnancy marks growth and maturation: e.g. ligaments stretch to accommodate another life, breasts ache as they fill with necessary nourishment. Likewise in labor, pain warns of new life’s impending arrival as the

baby's crowing head insists the cervix dilates opening to allow mother and child to differentiate completely for the first time. In such ways, the promise of physical pain and the struggle of labor in Genesis 3.16 cannot automatically be conflated with the cause of human suffering. No less, the man's physical pain in tilling the ground assures that muscles are being developed. Indeed, marked by the sweat of his brow, the man's toil is not futile, nor does it result in his infirmity. Instead, the divine promise clearly affirms that his pain and toil empower him to produce yields that continually supply him with bread – even unto all the days of his life!

Genesis 3 helps us recognize that the physical pain and the struggle of toil are organic to the structure of human experiences are by no means tantamount to the theological insistence that God wills our suffering. The pain and toil are part of the *tov* organic to the woman's experience of having children prior to her eating of the tree of knowledge, these are natural dimensions of the woman's experience of *tov* in Creation, and not added in after her eating of the tree, as if they could be interpreted as suggesting divine punishment. An intensification of the woman's experience of pain and struggle does however, present a problem – a threat, if you will, to the divine intention that humanity (in partnership together) should multiply and “fill the earth.” Why would the woman, having experienced her vulnerability to the pain and struggle accompanying the *tov* of creating new life, seek to return to embrace her husband again, once she has learned it is to be marked by more pain and greater difficulty of struggle? With the promised increase in pain and difficulty of hardship around conception and pregnancy, how is the woman to realize the literal truth of her *tov* as “God-bearer”?

Here, we turn to the work of Mitchell in his address of a vital point regarding the translation of desire or *teshuqa*, in the verse:

The word rendered desire is found in only two other places in the Old Testament, Gen. 4:7 and Cant. 7:11 (10). In the former, where the text is doubtful, it can only mean inclination, and in the latter, where it is used of a man, it has the force of affection. There is ground, therefore, for the opinion that the author in this passage meant to make Jehovah say that the very tenderness of the woman for her husband would prove a disadvantage to her. But it is not necessary to insist upon a changed interpretation, for, granted that the old one is correct, it has not the significance alleged, since the increased sensuality of the woman is represented, not as the effect of partaking of the forbidden fruit, but as a part of the penalty for so doing.

So Mitchell finds is that in the three renderings of *teshuqa* in the Hebrew scriptures, the word has the “force of affection.” This is confirmed historically. The earliest ancient renderings of the *teshuqa* are translated *alliance* or *turning*, with the connotation of an affectionate turning towards another, and suggestive of a partnering alliance.⁸⁵

Mashal + Bet

⁸⁵ Katherine Bushnell’s research in *God’s Word to Women*, offers the most thorough research on the historical renderings or translations of *teshuqua* as found in the 12 most ancient versions of scripture. Her research reveals a very unified interpretation of the word (10 times out of 12) as “turning,” “direction,” or “alliance,” with a meaning suggestive of an collaborative orientation towards her husband.

Consider: The Septuagint Greek from 285 B.C.E. Genesis 3:16, *turning*; Syriac Peshitto from 100 C.E. to 50 C.E. Genesis 3:16, *wilt turn*; the Samaritan of the Pentateuch only 100 AD to 50 AD Genesis 3:16, *turning*; the Old Latin from 200 C.E. Genesis 3:16, *turning*; the Sahidic from 300 C.E. Genesis 3:16, *alliance*; the Boharic in 350 C.E. Genesis 3:16, *turning*; the Aethiopic from 500 C.E. Genesis 3:16 *turning*; the Arabic Uncertain Genesis 3:16, *direction*; including interpretations that emerge under Rabbinical influence: Aquila’s Greek from 140 C.E. Genesis 3:16, *alliance*; and Symmachus’ Greek from 160 C.E. Genesis 3:16, *alliance* – all depict the *teshuqua* as connoting a “turning” or “direction,” and “alliance.” Bushnell reveals that it is not until the Latin Vulgate in 382 C.E., a translation infamously not developed through a study of the original languages, that *teshuqua*, as used in Genesis 3:16, comes to connote something very different, Genesis 3:16, power. But from there on in, and under the influence of “purely rabbinical teaching,” the Pentateuch in the Babylon Targum from 800 C.E. introduces a translation of *teshuqua* in Genesis 3:16 as “lust.” *God’s Word to Women* by Katherine C. Bushnell (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality) Reprint, 2003. See Appendix A.

Furthermore, the discovery that the *msl* root translated as “rule over” in Gen 3:16 is only done so because its association with the preposition *bet* -- normatively translated “in, at, with, by, through” -- is suggested to render *msl* an idiom expressing a secondary meaning for the root. Associated with authority, *msl* + *bet* as an idiom is said to express a military dominance that is translated as “lording over.” However, where *teshuqa* is translated *alliance* or *affection*, and the *msl* + *bet* is freed from idiomatic compulsion and permitted to be express its plainer translation, the verse becomes:

the woman’s *teshuqa* is for the man = your affection/alliance
 will turn you towards your husband
 and he may/shall/will *msl* + *bet* = rule in/by/with/through
 you.

Bet and Divine Provision for Progeny: in, by, with, through

Because poetic phrases in Hebrew frequently forego or suspend rules of interpretation that might otherwise apply in prose, the preposition בְּ is translated as *in* or *through*. Freed from the influence of idiomatic necessity, the above translation challenges the historical realities generated by the traditional interpretative insistence that the passage unquestionably advocates a paradigm for gender-relations framed by power-domination in which the man is divinely sanctioned to be in authority over the woman. While the verse certainly pertains to gendered realities/experiences, the choke-hold patriarchal insistence that the passage establishes divinely sanctioned relational patterns of domination/submission emerges as misplaced, and an inaccurate understanding of what the text addresses.

Indeed, inspired by the most original meanings of *alliance* and *affectionate turning*, the

embrace of a more contextually-appropriate understanding of *teshuqa* as the woman's *alliance* and *turning towards* her husband emerges as a form of divine insurance. The woman's *teshuqa* underwrites a relational reciprocity towards the man as woman is described as turning continually to turn her husband in the power of an alliance and affection that results in her empowering her husband to rule *with*, or *by* and *through* her. Permitted to express the most ancient and original meanings organic to *teshuqa* the verse emerges effortlessly as an assurance that human progeny – an all-important concern for ancient nomadic Hebrews – will continue, in harmony with the divine call in Genesis 1.26-28, that humanity should multiply and exercise authority in creating relationships with the rest of Creation.

The appropriateness of this interpretation is further supported by the evidence of a related concern expressed in the first part of the verse: difficulties in conception. Rendered thus, the entire verse reads as an expression of Divine provision that reassures the woman: despite the reality of struggle around conception and difficulty with “*bearing*” (translated as the more accurate *pregnancy*) – suggestive of struggles carrying to term —the provision of divine promise ensures that woman's desire will turn her again and again, with affection, to her husband.

Allowing *teshuqa* to signify how the woman's affection and alliance for her husband will enable him to rule through her, transforms a misinterpretation about punishment, into an epiphany of divine faithfulness. In the final analysis, Mitchell's insightful note about the single word, *teshuqa* uncovers a more original meaning to Genesis 3.16 as expressing God's faithful intent to empower humanity's ability to fulfill the only command addressed to the man and woman together: “be fruitful and multiply.”

The Ground: “cursed because of you”

Gen 3.17 And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

Gen 3.18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.

Gen 3.19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

Traditional interpretations insist Genesis 3.17 expresses divine judgment against the man for disobeying God and listening to his wife about the tree God instructed him not to eat. Yet the perspective of benevolent creation invites our hospitality towards the man, and affirms his intention to act in accordance to the truth of his *toil* – specifically as one created to fill the need for one who would till the ground (Genesis 2.5)⁸⁶ -- and to do so in partnership with the rest of Creation. Furthermore, while Genesis 2.5 and 15 make clear that it is the man’s calling to be tiller of the ground, we must remember that Genesis 1.26-28 reminds us of a still more fundamental theological anthropological insight about the man:

Gen. 1:26 ¶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

Gen. 1:27 So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

⁸⁶ Gen. 2:5 when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground;

Gen. 2:15 ¶ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Gen. 1:28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

Vocationally, this description of the divine conception of humanity makes clear that the man and the woman are fundamentally partnered in manifesting the wholeness of the kind of being humanity is. There cannot be a fulfillment of humanity’s destiny in the singular development of either the man or the woman: it is in connected partnership with each other that God designs humankind. Their partnership, among other things, is designed to empower them to flourish in their likeness with the Divine. There is clear diversity and multiple facets to humanity’s vocation, as laid out in Genesis 1.26-28. As a result of their likeness they are given dominion over the rest of Creation, and in being blessed, humanity is called “to be fruitful and multiply...fill the earth and subdue it.” Yet while these verses leave no doubt that abundance in progeny is included in the nature of human blessedness, it is by no means deemed the exclusive expression of human blessing. Whatever it means to be in the likeness of the Divine, it results in humanity’s capacity and responsibility to exercise dominion, the practice of rule or authority within Creation. In other words, a *tov* organic to humanity is the agency and authority to structure relationships with the other *tov* throughout Creation, and in doing so, not merely to exercise the ability of agency to have relationships, but to embrace the authority that makes humanity responsible for the kinds of relationships it will empower within Creation.

For this reason, the woman’s critical identity as *‘ezer kenegdo* represents for Adam an expression of a necessarily mutual and complementary existence.⁸⁷ As *‘ezer kenegdo* the

⁸⁷ Genesis 2.18 indicates the woman is an *‘ezer kenegdo*, a helper corresponding

woman represents for Adam a strength and power appropriate to him: one whose partnership empowers him to inhabit an existence fitting his nature as God-bearer. Thus, her partnership is not only appropriate to the kind of being he is, but also generative of the creative support and strength in fulfilling his vocation to be “in the likeness of” God.

Intended to empower his capacity to inhabit that existence most befitting his nature as “God-bearer” manifesting the likeness of God, the woman demonstrates that she does just that in sharing with her partner from her highest *tov*, intending his best. Thus, while familiar with interpretations that insist Genesis 3.17 expresses divine judgment against the man for disobeying God and listening to his wife’s about the tree God instructed him not to eat, the perspective of *benevolent creation* invites our hospitality towards the man, and affirms his intention to act in accordance to the truth of his *tov* — and to do so in partnership with the rest of Creation.

Genesis 3.17-19 indicates the ground as being cursed, “because of you.” Indeed, because the Hebrew conjugation of the verb for labor indicates only an intensification of effort – hence the translation, “toil” (NRSV) – the passage conveys the necessity of increased effort, not the introduction of that which was never previously required of the man. Thus, together with the clarity that Adam was created and placed in the garden with the vocation of tilling the ground, Genesis 3.17 offers the promise that increased effort secures for him the provision of harvest *all the days of his life*. The promise that one’s work will result in an abundance that persists or endures throughout the whole of one’s life emerges as a tremendous assurance – not to be lost to a misreading of the nature of curse. The myriad uncertainties involved in agricultural efforts, including crop vulnerability to unpredictable weather, threat of famine, raiding by wild creatures, diseased crops, etc. the

appropriately, or be-fitting the man’s own nature.

steadfast certainty of harvest, and promise of abundant fruitfulness delivered in this divine utterance emerge undeniably remarkable and truly reassuring.

Significantly, in each of these verses describing Adam’s vocational experiences, any mention of the ground’s vulnerability is immediately partnered with a countering assurance that balances what Adam will experience. So while the cursed ground is described as producing thorns and thistles in relationship to Adam, “for you,” the very next line describes the same wilderness – that is, the ground beyond the domesticated space of the garden that is being contrasted, as where the promise of blessing emerges unexpectedly: Adam is told he will be able to “eat the plants of the fields.” The same wilderness that will require him to cope with thorns and thistles will bless him as a source of provision, as Adam will experience even the provision of that which he cannot labor for: the wilderness plants – berries and roots, according to one commentator – will no less provide for Adam the strength of their yield, even while he does nothing to labor or toil for them.

Even with the intensification of labor depicted in the description, “by the sweat of his brow,” the divine assurance is that bread will never be lacking for Adam until his time comes to return to the ground!⁸⁸ In contrast to traditional interpretations, the passage reads not like punishment, but as a generously and reassuring benediction. In the truth of his

⁸⁸ The *wav* that traditional interpretations insist on translating as “and” in Genesis 3.17-19 is also translated, “but.” Since determining usage or which meaning is most suitable for a text is dependent upon context, our fundamental interpretive presumption -- that the narrative does not suggest punishment, but the benevolence of divine love – invites us to read for benediction of divine provision:

And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you BUT you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

blessedness, Adam will discover the strength of his vocational connection to the ground regardless of what his labor or toil must be, or the thorns and thistles that manifest. God's enduring blessedness endures in the provision of daily bread that endures until the end of his days.

Hidden under the looming shadow of past interpretations that establish the importance of these verses for offering a description of the "cursed" reality is that they highlight the intensification of effort, via toil and sweat, that will be required for the man to secure nourishment. This is another more intriguing description – a promise of a blessed reality in which the man's experience of provision will be unrelenting, and the abundance enduring. The divine reassurance is unabashed: man will not face scarcity, but rather will eat, "...all the days of your life..."; moreover, he will find that he is able to make bread "until you return to the ground," (Gen 3.18, 19). The final gift of the divine oracle comes as a benediction at the end of Gen 3.19 in the promise that man will be welcomed by the ground – the life-giving substance from which God shaped the earth-being, "for out of it you were taken; you are earth, and to earth you shall return." All the more, in light of Gen 4, Gen 3.19 emerges as a promise of blessing, reassuring humanity of its on-going connection to the life-giving substance from which it was wrought. We come to see in Genesis 3 and 4 that cursedness manifests as different expressions of *toiv* coming into relationship with each other. As such, curse is a condition expressing the truth of a relational tension.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ The Condition of Curse: Genesis 4. A comparison of the Genesis 3 and 4 narratives clearly offers compelling testimony of the nature of cursedness and how Adam, and later his son, Cain, experience the condition of cursedness. It is in Genesis 4.11 that the divine ascribes the experience of "curse" directly with humanity, though it is worth noting that even that single association lacks any sense of the divine causing humanity to be cursed (the causative *hifil* tense is not used here to describe the divine causing curse): "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from

The Intersubjectivity of Cursedness

Thus, cursedness comes to mediate a valuable awareness of interconnectedness that can function to edify, regardless of whether the illumination is welcomed or received.

Interestingly, while relationships manifesting cursedness may challenge our conviction of

your hand.” (NRSV) The verse clearly indicates that Cain’s experience of curse is mediated through his partnership with Creation: it is in his relationship with the ground—that element in Creation most intimately connected to his self-understanding -- that Cain is finally able to grasp the terrible truth of his violation. It is Cain’s relationship with the definitive dimension of his self-understanding (he is the tiller of the ground and not the keeper of sheep) that finally mirrors back to him the perspective to see how he has, in harming another, irrevocably harmed himself.

Another dimension of the knowledge of good and evil becomes manifest as the damage to the *tov* of the very distinction/uniqueness that fundamentally designates the difference between Cain and Abel (and not his relationship to Abel as a brother one who is like him) finally awakens Cain to the experience of loss. Yet this initial awareness of loss neither makes clear that Cain accepts the interdependence of his *tov* with that of his brother, nor that he grieves the annihilation of his brother even after discovering that the loss of Abel’s *tov* cripples his own well-being and thriving. Thus, the verses following the divine discovery of Cain’s violation of his brother, Abel, (Genesis 4.11-14) can be read theologically as offering an inaugural narrative of humanity’s fall.

Cain cries out against the harshness of the consequences to himself. Yet that which he projects onto God as punishment – i.e. the force of an external power judging against him – is made clear through the text to be the natural consequences his own actions. As the narrative reports that the blood of Abel cries out against him, and the ground refuses to yield its strength, it is significant that the order of Creation is described as responding to Cain’s action.

Here we glimpse again the radical inter-subjectivity and living connectedness of all Creation: in organic response to the violation of Abel, his blood is received by the ground, whose energy rises up in testimony against Cain. The ground cries out to the Divine, and the Divine hears – as if witness. And interestingly, it is not the Divine who metes out justice, but the ground who has the power to exercise its strength and is described as refusing to yield its abundance to Cain. The ground is described as responding in empathy with Abel, compassionately receiving the blood of Abel from Cain’s hand. In fact, God requires an accounting of Cain, citing a report of the injustice that is seemingly given voice through the life-blood of Abel magnified in chorus by the ground. It would seem we are given a vision of Creation as saturated with living energy throughout; and empowered with the same benevolence of intention and desire of love manifested by its Creator. Therefore Genesis 4 is the place where humanity authors the first experience from knowing evil.

blessedness, the condition of cursedness also mediates awareness of the inescapable interdependence natural to the majority of our relationships. It bears reiteration that the condition of cursedness is an opportunity to become aware of our shadow selves: fears that have not come to our consciousness. The gift of cursedness mediates our encounter of those aspects of ourselves we have judged as somehow inadequate and rejected as undesirable or threatening. Encountering the struggle and pain represented by our feelings of frustration, failure, and self-condemnation not only allows us to become conscious of those unwelcome dimensions of ourselves that we have judged with banishment, but invites us to consider the possibility of embracing the healing of a wholeness realized as we extend compassionate hospitality towards such interior otherness we find in ourselves.

Epistemologically, the gift of cursedness further illumines the ontological truth that a radical interdependence shapes the relationships ordered in a *benevolent creation*. The description of the territorial competition introduced by the enmity between humanity and serpent kind, just as much as the description of struggle between wilderness and cultivated ground inherent in humanity's efforts to harvest sustenance from the earth, introduces the clear awareness that the flourishing of one kind of *tov* balances the thriving of another. Yet this encounter of the limits of a finite existence expresses the truth – long ago described so vividly by Augustine – that the fundamental nature of evil is an absence or deprivation of the good already in existence. The brilliance of divine benevolence embeds the gift of finitude throughout Creation so that the nature of *tov* as relational, and indeed, cultivated through the necessity of appreciative partnership, becomes evident whenever the *tov* of one form of existence carelessly aspires to defy the limits of finitude. The danger of transgressing the *tov* of finitude organically exposes the harm brought to the rest of Creation when the relational dynamic of idolatry introduces the absolutizing deception of self-importance. Cursedness

manifests a warning: failure to recognize the gift of finitude shaping the *tov* of Creation will result in a violation of the divine love manifested as benevolent provision and protective hospitality towards the Other.

The nature of curse: Forgetting Finitude.

The experience of cursedness also reveals the necessary struggle that emerges when one expression of *tov* forgets to embrace its finitude, because the well-being of one kind is equally vulnerable to, and tied up with the thriving of another in benevolent creation. When a dangerous denial of shared existence and partnership results in a particular existence – whether seduced by delusions of grandeur, unaware of the necessity of other forms of *tov*, etc. – it can grow, unchecked by the grounding of finitude, as a self-importance that seeks mindlessly to inhabit an existence exceeding any harmonious interconnectedness with others. Denying the life-support needed to sustain the goodness and beauty inhabited by another, this corrupted expression of *tov* inhabits a distorted self-importance that refuses hospitality of *tov* for the Other with whom Creation is shared. Thus even while manifesting the appearance of flourishing, a corrupted *tov* expresses only a deceptive thriving that fails to reflect the benevolent hospitality necessary for the wholeness experienced through existential integrity.

The Benediction: A Promise of Connectedness

Ultimately, understanding Genesis 3.19 as benediction, the verses following the divine discovery of Cain's violation of his brother, Abel (Genesis 4.11-14) appear to concur

with theologian Martin Buber's suggestion that the narrative of Cain killing Abel, rather than the story of Eve and Adam eating of the tree of knowledge, is the inaugural narrative depicting humanity's fall. Agreeing with Buber, a comparison of the Genesis 3 and 4 narratives clearly offers compelling testimony that humanity directly experiences the condition of cursedness in Genesis 4. It is in Genesis 4.11 that the divine ascribes the experience of "curse" directly with humanity, though it is worth noting that even that single association lacks any sense of the divine causing humanity to be cursed (the causative *hifil* tense is not used here to describe the divine causing curse): "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand." (NRSV) The verse clearly indicates that Cain's experience of curse is directly related to his vocational relationship with the ground. This definitive association between Cain and the ground echoes the same association originally established between Adam and his vocation as tiller and keeper of God's garden in Genesis 2.15: "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it." (NRSV)

Even with the intensification of labor depicted in the description, "by the sweat of his brow," the divine assurance is that bread will never be lacking for Adam until his time comes to return to the ground! In contrast to traditional interpretations, the passage reads not like punishment, but as a generously and reassuring benediction. In the truth of his blessedness, Adam will discover the strength of his vocational connection to the ground regardless of thorns and thistles, or labor and toil that must be manifest. God's enduring blessedness will be manifest in the provision of daily bread that endures until the end of his days.

The Man: Not Cursed

God does *not* curse the man. Nor does God cause the curse of the ground. Rather the ground is described as cursed. The verb tense used to describe the ground being cursed does not indicate that God is the actor causing the curse. While Genesis 3: 14 and 16 use the *hif'il* tense to express God acting upon the good serpent and the faithful woman, Genesis 3.17 does not describe God as enacting the curse. The text does not say, "I will curse the ground, or I curse the ground," as if the curse were actually prescribed by the divine. Rather the divine acknowledges the condition of cursedness.

If God is not the cause of the condition of curse associated for the first time with Creation, what is the significance of the curse? We begin by recalling Tribble's identification of man as 'adham. According to Tribble, the term, 'adham, is most primarily a reference to the man's identity as one formed from the earth, one made from the substance of earth, -- making the point that the ground or earth is not only foundational to his work, but to his very being.⁹⁰ This recognition, that the earth or ground that man works is, in fact, the very substance from which God has wrought man's own being, gives much greater significance to his work as one who tills the earth. Tribble reminds us that the man, who has been taken from and formed of earth, is given the vocation of tending to and tilling it.

Tribble's nuanced work enables the recognition fundamental to reading vv. 17-19 as something other than curse. Consider: whereas traditional understanding of these verses involves the suggestion that man or the ground is cursed, when read through a praxis of

⁹⁰ "Ambiguity characterizes the meaning of 'adham in Genesis 2-3. On the one hand, man is the first creature formed (2:7). The Lord God puts him in the garden 'to till it and keep it,' a job identified with the male (cf. 3:17-19). On the other hand, 'adham is the generic term for humankind. In commanding 'adham not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Deity is speaking to both the man and the woman (2:16-17). Until the differentiation of the female and male (2:21-23), 'adham is basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes."

beauty the verse surrenders the understanding that God is issuing a divine oracle of another order: rather than being severed and alienated from that which is literally the very ground of his being, man is blessed with the reassurance that his vocation as one who tills will continue with a fruitfulness exceeding his own labors. Understanding this, a new read of Genesis 3.17-19 can emerge.

Yet where some traditional arguments invent the interpretation that man is cursed by having to begin to toil for that which he has not previously, our interpretation of the Genesis 3 builds on the theological anthropology introduced in Genesis 2. Genesis 2 imparts the recognition that the man is in fact introduced to Creation because there is none to till the earth (Genesis 2.5) as one who is placed in God's garden, to till and keep the garden (Genesis 2.15). Thus Genesis 3 is not misinterpreted as suggesting that the man is newly required to till the ground as a consequence of punishment. If anything, the Hebrew usage that indicates an intensification of the labor and effort required in the toil of tilling the ground serves to confirm that labor is inherently presumed if it is merely intensified, rather than introduced. This same implication should be noted for the verses referring to the woman's experience (Genesis 3.16) but we will speak to that fact later.

Further, critical to our understanding of the passage is the interpretation of transitional words in the verses. The first is **כי** *ki*, in Genesis 3.17, translated "because," in the statement, "because thou has harkened unto the voice of thy wife...." (KJV). Another is the conjunction **ו** *vav* found in Genesis 3.18, linking the two latter clauses "thorns and

thistles it shall bring forth for you” and “you shall eat the plants of the field,” together.⁹¹

Ki as a particle conjunction is identified with its second meaning in Genesis 3.17 because it occurs with a hypotaxis,⁹² or subordinate clause in the verse. This generally gives the conjunction a causal meaning, inviting its translation most frequently as, “that, because, when,” words indicating that what happens in the principal clause is as a result of what happens in the subordinate clause (being introduced by the *ki*). Thus the decision to translate the *ki* as “when” maintains a causal relationship between the two clauses, while permitting a different nuance: “When you listened to the voice of your wife....the ground was cursed...”

Traditionally, the *waw* has been translated as “and,” yet it is equally common to read

⁹¹ Cursedness: The Ground Refuses to Yield Its Strength
(A brief commentary on the theme of ground in Genesis 4)

Indeed, the nature of the curse, and how Cain will experience it, emerges all the more focused as we recall that Genesis 4.2 introducing Cain as “a tiller of the ground.” (NRSV) Specifically, it is Cain’s relationship with the ground, the earth, that is described as transformed by his act of killing his Abel. The ground is depicted as mirroring both the violent truth of Abel’s violation, and the subsequent transformation of Cain’s relationship to the *toʿv* of Creation. With compelling pathos, Genesis 4.11 portrays the ground as the recipient of the life energy that Cain takes from Abel. Yet the ground is not a passive recipient. Significantly, Genesis 4.12 describes the ground as having a responsive capacity to the violation that has occurred! The ground is said to answer Abel’s blood by opening “its mouth.” Then having received the energy of Abel’s life into itself, the ground is attributed with a capacity akin to intention as the narrative depicts it as resisting Cain’s efforts to work the ground. What is made clear is that the allegiance of the ground has changed: the ground no longer partners with Cain to offer the fruits of its strength. Rather, having received the blood of Abel, the ground is transformed by its life-energy, empowered to refuse to “yield its strength” to Cain. In this way, Abel’s blood and the ground are intriguingly partnered in the verse: the energy of the Abel’s life, now embodied in the ground, is able to resist the force of Cain’s strength at last. The ground serves as an instrument of justice for Abel. Ultimately, Cain’s vocational connection to the ground is irrevocably lost. This result stands in stark contrast to the relationship that emerges between Adam, the first tiller, and the ground in Genesis 3.17-19. Here the divine description of the ground being cursed functions to testify that, despite the necessary intensification of toil and effort, Adam will continue to receive from the ground the blessedness of abundance.

⁹² hypotaxis is a subordinate clause instead of the principal clause, or parataxis.

the conjunction alternatively as “but” or “however”. This being the case, and since determining which usage is most suitable is dependent upon context, our decision to read the text from the fundamental presumption that the narrative testifies of divine benevolence, invites us to consider the alternative meaning, “however,” in re-reading the text:

Gen. 3:17 And to the man God said, “When you listened to the voice of your wife, and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed was the ground because of you; with toil you will eat of it all the days of your life;

Gen. 3:18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; HOWEVER you shall eat the plants of the field.

Gen. 3:19 With sweat dripping from your nose, you will eat bread until you return to the ground because from it you were taken; HOWEVER you are transitory, and to what is transitory⁹³ you will return.”

Unlike traditional interpretations that insist these verses read as pronouncement of blame and punishment, translating the conjunction *waw* as “however,” sheds new light on meaning of the passage. Allowing God to speak the compassionate assurance of enduring provision, Genesis 3.17-19 is liberated to express the affirmation of the man’s decision to act in partnership with the woman provided for him by the Divine, and to offer assurance of blessedness that will persist despite struggle. In this light, the passage reads as a profound benediction and not a curse in the traditional sense.

“When you heeded/hearkened to the voice of your wife,” not only places the emphasis on the man’s decision to collaborate with his wife, but acknowledges the importance of the act that empowers humanity -- as man and woman together -- to manifest the full God-likeness possible only as they act in partnership with another. (Genesis 1.26-27)

⁹³ עָפָר—1. fine dry top-soil, **dust:** a)...iii) אֲרֵץ what is trivial, transitory Gn 3.19 Ps 103.14 Jb 4.19 8.19 10.9 Qoh 3.20 12.7.

Indeed, recalling that the whole likeness of the Divine cannot be manifest by humanity apart from the partnership of male and female together, the Divine's emphasis on the man's decision to collaborate with his new partner takes on the significance of commendation rather than condemnation.

The process of this partnership is laid out most clearly in the Genesis 2.24. Speaking beyond mere description, the verse functions with the authority of a prescription confirming what the divine intends for man and woman in marriage. In particular, the man matures through a process of individuation that involves his "forsaking," or leaving parents.⁹⁴ As abandoning one's parents explicitly precipitates the consummation of a new partnership between a husband and his wife, the narrative is not read as advocating the eradication of relationality between a man and his parents.⁹⁵ Instead, given that marriage introduces the primary context of a new partnership between a husband and a wife, the verse is an apology. It advocates the dissolution of a man's primary relational dependence on his parents, in order to re-invest the relational authority traditionally represented by parents, into the newer relationship in union with a wife. Genesis 2.24 imparts the awareness that the process of the man's maturing is fulfilled when he embraces a new authority that becomes

⁹⁴ According to HALOT, the verb in Genesis 2.24 means "1. to **leave**...; אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ Gn 2.24 (Willi Ftschr. Zimmerli 539)..." The Hebrew verb עָזַב can be translated, "to leave" or "to forsake," and connotes departure with the strength of giving up or abandonment.

⁹⁵ I find insightful Von Rad's recognition that a man leaving his parents coincides more with understandings of marriage known in matriarchal cultures, while agreeing that the verse is not best taken to be representing a legal custom so much as a relational dynamic, albeit a cultural "drive." As he states, "Curiously, the statement about forsaking father and mother does not quite correspond to the patriarchal family customs of ancient Israel, for after the marriage the wife breaks loose from her family much more than the man does from his. Does this tendentious statement perhaps preserve something from a time of matriarchal culture? One must emphasize, however, that our narrative is not concerned with a legal custom but with a drive. It is clearly evident that v. 24 is a conclusion, and that with it the end of a formerly independent and compact luster of material has been reached." Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press), 83.

forged in his partnership with a wife. Furthermore, while Genesis 2.24 makes evident that the man matures through a process of shedding the external authority of parents, it is Genesis 3.17 that offers the recognition: in having “heeded” the voice of his wife – the one given to him by God -- the man makes true or actual the very partnership necessary for humanity to manifest the whole likeness of God. In other words, the man makes possible the likeness of God that the woman could not accomplish on her own, and vice versa.

Before moving to discuss the consequences associated with the man’s decision, we make still one more significant observation. Genesis 3.17 highlights that the man has, “heeded the voice of [his] wife,” as the particular way the man honors his partnership with his wife.⁹⁶ With regards to the nature of authority, then, Genesis 2.24 suggests that in leaving the dependence represented by the parent-child relationship, the man foregoes the external authority symbolized by his parents. It is suggested that authority is transferred to a new interdependence with his wife. However, when taken together with the Genesis. 3.17 description that the man “heeded the voice of [his wife],” the man’s relationship with authority appears to have shifted more significantly than is represented by a mere transfer from one relationship to another. Indeed, whereas in relationship to his parents, they held external authority over him, Genesis 3.17 suggests that the man’s willingness to “hearken” (KJV) or “heed” – that is, listen with intelligence and comprehension – makes him responsible for discerning as well as making his own decision about what he deems authoritative for himself. In other words, he does not merely do what his wife says, he discerns with an intelligence honoring his own authority, whether what he hears through the voice of his wife merits his agreement and collaboration.

⁹⁶ כִּי-שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹלִי = The NRSV translates this, “Because you have listened to the voice of...”

Abundance and Provision

Traditional interpretations suggest that an intensification of labor is required because the ground's productivity is reduced as a result of divine punishment. But the interpretive paradigm of benevolent creation invites another the interrogation of such an interpretation and a new reading of Genesis 3:17-19. What is to be made of the fact that the effects of "curse" result in the promise of fulfilled abundance and enduring provision? After all, the divine not only assures the man that the ground will produce for the man every day of his life, "you shall eat of it all the days of your life," (Genesis 3.18) and that this fruitfulness of the ground on the man's behalf will only be interrupted by the end of the man's existence, "you shall eat bread until you return to the ground." (Genesis 3.19) In point of fact, the verses describe a fruitfulness that provides for the man beyond the labor of his own hand: Genesis 3.18 is clear that even the wilderness will offer sustenance for the man -- the suggestion being that the man will enjoy the fruitfulness of that which he has not even toiled for, "and you shall eat of the plants of the field."⁶

In "When Adam Delved: The Meaning of Genesis III.23," (1988) Nicholas Wyatt furthers the argument that tilling is not unusual or new business for man and discerns compellingly that the "plants of the fields," referenced in Genesis 3.18 represents the produce of roots and berries and other forms of nourishment discovered without the necessity of agricultural labor in the wilderness: "berries and wild plants not involving agriculture." In agreement, our paradigm of *benevolent creation* enables us to perceive that contrary to traditional interpretations of the passage, suggestions – the earth does not appear cursed in these two passages. Rather Genesis 3.17ff proclaims the promise of divine benediction in which the man, the earth creature, is reassured that his fundamental connection with the earth he was taken from will not be severed. As one made from the

earth, he is given the vocation to till the earth and keep it, Gen. 2.17.

Wyatt helps illumine this point more clearly. The man will not lose his all-important connection to the source of his being. Instead, we are told in the story that the ground keeps faith and abundantly continues to yield “for” him—that is, on his behalf, rather than as punishment—what Wyatt translates with intriguing accuracy as, “berries and wild plants not involving agriculture,” including that fruitfulness beyond the agricultural labors of the man. Even while conceding that v. 23 occurs in the context of Yahweh’s curse, Wyatt’s contends,

This passage is at odds with the immediately preceding verses which **begin the curse**, for while “food as something from the soil is presumably to be understood in terms of cereals, implying agriculture and therefore the tilling of the soil which is understood in v. 23, vv. 17-18 refer in more general terms to the cursing of the ground, **but in specific terms to food as “brambles and thistles”** – that is berries and wild plants not involving agriculture.⁹⁷

Eve: The Mother of All Living

Gen 3.20 The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living. Gen 3.21 And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

There is no sense of surprise or condemnation expressed as the Divine counsel confirms the epistemological transformation in humanity: there is no suggestion that humanity finding the fruit of the tree of knowledge “pleasing,” is problematic. Indeed, implicit in the warning given to humanity to counter possible temptation to eat of the fruit

⁹⁷ While Wyatt makes the point that the earth is both the man’s mother and his bride, in order to make a point other than the one I am arguing here; however, his exegetical insight from Genesis 2.14 highlighting the clarity of man’s vocation in Eden is no less valuable for our difference in conclusions.

of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is the awareness that human desire will be drawn to such truth, thus revealing that knowledge of good and evil is a desirable good, even if it is dangerous.

No divine rebuke that contradicts the soundness of humanity's discernment that the fruit of the tree of knowledge is good for many things, including wisdom. Neither is there condemnation for the desire for wisdom and good that finally compels humanity's decision to eat and to share what is recognized as having a three-fold goodness. The woman, irresistibly drawn by the desire to know and choose that which is good, does not do so without a thorough process of reflection on the nature of what she desires. She models humanity's capacity for self-reflection and the necessary agency of taking responsibility for one's own understanding.

At first she holds up the divine prohibition: it is a decision made for her by God. She highlights a respect and regard for the Divine instruction in how she applies it to herself, and not just to the man, as the grammar of the original command would suggest as the sole audience for God's instructions. Yet she is equally mindful of the truth recognizes in the serpent's description of her capacity and that of the tree. It is, finally, the longing of *erotic faithfulness* in the woman that compels her to engage in a process of co-creating with the partners given to share her existence. First with the serpent, then the tree of knowledge, and finally with the man to whom she is partnered with, but ultimately in partnership with the divine who imbues her with the vocation of being God-bearer, one able to imitate the Divine in the co-creative work through her *praxis of beauty*.

As she engages a *praxis of beauty*, the woman models a critical self-authorizing agency as she inherently recognizes her capacity for discernment imbues her with the ability, and therefore the responsibility to engage. She comes to the awareness that a decision is before

her: she must examine for herself the nature of the decision, because the serpent challenges her with a question implicitly testing whether the woman is willing to take responsibility for a decision that holds uncertainty. Likewise, it is possible, that if the Divine is interpreted as sustaining compassion for humanity, then it is out of a concern for the fragility of the human frame and a desire to limit the interminable suffering humanity might experience if eternity rather than finitude modified our existence, that causes the Divine to deny humanity immortality. Not because immortality may not be a gift, when bequeathed by the divine, but because in the context of humanity's capacity to know good and evil, immortality now emerges as the greatest threat to humanity's well-being. By introducing humanity to the finitude of a physical existence, the divine seeks to protect humanity from a fate, quite literally, worse than death.

Reading Genesis 3 through a paradigm of *benevolent creation* empowers that ironic clarity: it is as humanity seeks the fulfillment of their highest *tov* that they encounter finitude, and in the fulfillment of finitude comes the confirmation of promised beatitude. Though the immunity of an Edenic existence has been lost through a pursuit of wisdom, and the idyll of ignorance has been pierced by the poignant truth of *tov*'s vulnerability (mediated by the knowing of good and evil) the hospitality of finitude emerges -- both as the cause of struggle and suffering, and as that structure of existence within which is promised the blessed relief of limits.

The tov of Death

Gen 3.22 ¶ Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"—

Such an interpretation of Genesis 3.1-5 invites the reexamination of still another significant theological claim made by traditional interpretations: death, or deprivation of immortality, as punishment for disobedience. Indeed, when viewed through truth of blessedness, the divine decision to protect the *tov* of human mortality represents the persistence of divine benevolence rather than a punitive repeal or deprivation of immortality. The radical testimony of Genesis 3 affirms that human blessedness is not deprived, but ensured by the *tov* of death.

The appreciation that the condition of finitude is organic to the *tov* of God's created order illumines our reading of Genesis 3 still further. Dominant Christian theological traditions interpret human mortality as manifesting a diminished existence, a condition of deprivation. In a narrative that deems humanity to have disobeyed God, human mortality represents the rhetorical significance of divine punishment, and death comes to symbolize an existence that has departed from the divine perfection original to God's created order.

Yet reading Genesis 3 as an assurance of blessing and recognizing finitude as a dimension of Creation's perfect *tov* offers a critical corrective to these traditional perspectives. Death does not disprove divine blessing. At no time does the narrative unfolding between Genesis 1 through 3 suggest that humanity is originally imbued with the capacity to live forever. And given that the divine makes clear in Genesis 3:22 that living forever is a capacity only to be imparted to humanity through their eating of the tree of life – something that humanity is not attributed to doing – it is clear that human immortality is not configured in that original wholeness of *tov* declared perfect by the divine.

The narrative does not suggest that death results because of humanity's sinful unworthiness or divine disapproval and punishment. Rather, viewed through the lens of *benevolent creation*, mortality can be appreciated as a dimension of human existence “pre-

dating” the divine decision preventing humanity from eating the tree of life. Theologically, the realization that humanity is neither presumed to be immortal, nor to have eaten of the Tree of Life that would allow them to live forever, prior to their exile from Eden imparts this valuable discernment: accepting the finitude of human life as original to Creation imparts to mortality the quality of being *tov*. Death, and even the potential for death, is not the antithesis of *tov* in the order of Creation -- as if death represented an energy invading Creation’s structure, working against the perfection enlivened by Divine *Eros*. The clarity that mortality is original to Creation instead invites the awareness that death, as well as its experience, represents another dimension of the truth of *tov* intended by Divine Love to empower the fulfillment of human flourishing in Creation.⁹⁸

Viewed through the lens of *benevolent creation* Genesis 1-3 clearly offers the narrative understanding that mortality is a *tov* appropriate to humanity and original to the perfection of *tov* associated with all Creation in Genesis 1. This imparts the theological recognition that the finitude of death, as expressed through the transitory nature of human life, embodies an existential integrity capable of mediating the truth of goodness and beauty organic to human existence.

The Protection of Exile

Gen 3.23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

⁹⁸ As part of the *tov* that is organic to Creation, neither death nor the potential for death, can be mistaken as representing punishment for wrongdoing (as invariably argued by patriarchal interpretations). Instead, reading this verse through the lens of the *benevolent creation* established in Genesis 1 makes it clear: that humanity’s capacity for mortality was presumed in that understanding/structure of Creation originally declared by God to be wholly (seven times) *tov*. As such death and humanity’s capacity for mortality is assumed to be part of the beauty and goodness expressing what is most appropriate to human life.

Gen 3.24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Death, understood as the protection of preventing humanity from being clothed with an immortal existence that would require humanity to suffer the struggle and pain of knowing good and evil for an eternity, mediates the truth of divine benevolence towards humanity. Given that the newfound knowledge of good and evil renders humanity vulnerable to experiences of toil, pain, struggle, and suffering, death conceptualized as a dimension of *tov* that expresses the mercy of divine compassion – a determination to protect a faithful humanity from unending vulnerability, and the suffering entailed in their knowing good and evil. Such an interpretation of death acknowledges that even where human mortality is concerned, the divine benevolence acts from compassionate love: human mortality is not a matter of punitive judgment, but the result of compassionate recognition that humanity's flourishing is best secured through finitude, rather than the other *tov* of immortality.

The Problem of Infinity

Such an understanding of humanity's relationship with death gives mortality the dignity of being an expression of *tov*. Interpreted through the paradigm of *benevolent creation*, human mortality is assumed to be presumed at the inception of Creation, such that the *tov* of human mortality, as with all expressions of *tov*, is theologically understood to be capable of energizing the fulfillment and flourishing of an existence most appropriate to humanity.

But how can an encounter with the limits mediated by Creation's structure of finitude, be counted as *tov*? One clue is found in the divine introducing mortality as an experience confirmed by humanity eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in

Genesis 2:17. The significance of this connection is echoed in the narrative description of Genesis 3:5 in which the serpent offers the oracular insight that the divine knows that eating of the tree will make humanity like God in “knowing good and evil”. From these references, we are offered the awareness that mortality mediates a *tov* in relation to humanity knowing good and evil. Partnered with the understanding that humanity’s knowing of good and evil introduces a profound awareness of vulnerability: not only the awareness that what we deem *tov* is vulnerable to be corrupted, destroyed, or otherwise diminished and lost to us in turn triggers our consciousness that we are vulnerable. Theologically, this consciousness can distort our perception and corrupt our confidence so that it becomes the point of fear and doubt that stimulates our suffering and struggle, and that of others, as we attempt to manage our lives in a way that leaves us invulnerable to the loss of the various *tov* that matters to us. So how is it possible to appreciate mortality, when it introduces a limit to the most fundamental *tov* of our existence?

When read through the wisdom of divine compassion, Eden shows that only in departing the apparent timelessness of Eden’s idyll can humanity be protected; we are not lost to our true selves in leaving Eden, but move towards coming to the truth of our being as we experience knowledge of good and evil. The tragic consequences of humanity’s newly realized capacity to inhabit a reality vulnerable to the truth of good and evil in finitude, though the good (and human experience of the good) will be terminal, perhaps most importantly, evil and experiences of evil will also be mercifully constrained by the limits of humanity’s finite existence.

This is not unlike the insight decisively conveyed at the conclusion of the provocative movie *Dogma*. The movie narrates the tale of two exiled angels who believe they have found a loop in the law of the universe that would allow them to return to the

presence of God. As the plan goes awry, one angel – completely overwrought by the agonizing recognition that their “foolproof” way of returning to heaven has failed – is unable to bear the thought of an eternity robbed of the presence of God. It is as though he is unable to sustain the profound knowledge “of good and evil,” (symbolized in the “goodness” of his awareness of the profound delight once present to him in knowing the presence of the Divine, and the intolerable “evil” of experiencing the absence of God): it is, as the psalmist confesses, a knowledge “too great” for him.

Exiled from heaven, the angel has far too intimate a knowledge of the goodness of God’s loving presence to be able to tolerate the evil -- that loss of *tov* – premised by an eternity bereft of the same. The evil of hopelessness promised in unending divine absence eventually generates a despairing, drunken, hysterical, frenzied killing spree of innocents, signaling the angelic being’s utter inability to face the obscenity of an eternal existence devoid of the delight of being in the presence of the Divine. Such a destructive rampage, of course, cannot be ignored by heaven; the angelic being knows this.

When God finally concedes to face the angel, the angel sobs in relief. In her presence, he is finally granted the opportunity to lay bare the fullness of his suffering. God sees him in his utter grief – in his knowing the *tov* of his life, and the evil wrought because of his pain at losing a *tov* so vital to his existence. As God gazes upon the despairing angel, her eyes convey attentive awareness of the brokenness and suffering of one precious to her. Hers is a look both tender with compassion and aware of the severity of the mercy that must be exercised to heal his suffering. Having a full knowledge of good and evil, the prospect of an eternity without the opportunity to return to the presence of God is an intolerable reality for this angelic being to face.

The angel is not unaware of the consequences of his actions, but rather than horror

at the coming judgment he responds with deep relief, welcoming the accounting that will bring offer him the wholeness appropriate to his *tov*. The exhausted angel sinks to his knees profoundly grateful, welcoming the end of what has become an interminable existence. For him, the judgment of God signals the only possible relief. His voice catching a sob replete with relief, the angel utters “Thank you,” and he bows his head to receive the merciful termination of what had become an intolerably distorted existence. As God opens her mouth to release a holy roar of judgment, it is the severity of infinite compassion that terminates the profound suffering of the angel. Thus, finitude is presented as a gift of the Divine, an act of compassion commensurate with the overwhelming nature of the truth mediated through a painful knowledge of good and evil.

Viewed through the lens of the Divine’s benevolent hospitality towards humanity, it becomes possible to see how preventing humanity from eating of the tree of life and protected humanity from being required “to live forever,” emerges as a compassion consistent with the graciousness of divine benevolence evidenced throughout Genesis 1-3.

Given that humanity has realized its capacity for knowing good and evil, their vulnerability to the loss and diminishment of *tov* is prevented from being a condition that must cause their suffering into eternity -- through the *tov* of mortality. In preserving the *tov* of death for humanity, God acts to protect that which is vitally appropriate to humanity, the good of finitude that assigns to human existence a humane termination in the face of the inappropriate possibility of interminable struggling through endless diminishment and loss of what is *tov*. Death is that hope for an existence that can be embraced without fear that the loss of what is *tov* will diminish the highest *tov* of one’s existence – that loss of *tov* which would truly make an existence unbearable. Mitchell finds the ending of Genesis 3 offers both an understanding of God’s compassion through a theological anthropology that has

humanity equipped no less in leaving Eden as they were while inhabiting the garden:

Thus it appears that the Jahwist does not teach that the moral nature of mankind was wrecked by the first disobedience, but, on the other hand, that it was this act which made the first pair independent moral beings. He must, therefore, have thought of them as leaving Paradise, in spite of the lapse of which they had been guilty, in possession of the same ability to obey the will of Jehovah, however, it might be revealed to them, which they had when they were created.⁹⁹

Thus, revisited through the clarity of the divine benevolence evidenced throughout Genesis 3, it becomes possible to recognize the instructional quality of God's warning to humanity. The verse offers an expression of God's protective intent to warn humanity that eating of the tree of knowledge will function to inaugurate the fulfillment of humanity's mortality. Understanding death as a *tov* inherent to the perfection of *benevolent creation* introduced by the hospitality of Divine *Eros* not only renders the clarity that humanity's death is not a threat of punishment, but assures that death expresses the protection of mortality is confirmed evidence of God's enduring benevolence towards humanity.¹⁰⁰

It is the God who gives the man the understanding that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil inaugurate humanity coming into conscious relationship with its mortality. The *tov* of mortality is clearly described as being energized by humanity – it is their decision that will actualize the *tov*. The serpent likewise notes that when human acts (when humanity eats), it is the singular result of their action that activates their becoming like God (in knowing good and evil). The significance of such clarity permits the recognition that the narrative develops a theological anthropology that invests humanity, from their time in

Eden, with the authority to co-create their experience of existence with the divine. This is a claim readily supported through by revisiting the way humanity's relationship with the divine is shaped in Genesis 1 and 2.

In Genesis 1, humanity is clearly ascribed as being made in the likeness of the divine, and then further, of being imbued with the sacred vocation of bearing the divine image. The particular efficacy of such an existence is expected by the divine to be manifest in humanity's ability to "be fruitful and multiply," with such fecundity that the divine adds with flourish, the anticipation that humanity will be able to fill the earth! And as if that were not co-creating ability enough, God ascribes to humanity the authority to subdue the earth and to have dominion over all living things that have been granted existence by the divine. Thus the theological anthropology of the Genesis 1 narrative makes clear explicitly clear – humanity is not only imbued with the generative capacity to be like God, but also appointed by virtue of bearing the divine image, with the responsibility to co-create existence in Creation such that there is a flourishing and abundance that maintains what the divine has already introduced.

Revisiting Genesis 2 with this understanding -- that humanity is ordained by divine command to imitate the divine in co-creating to generate the flourishing of existence -- it is possible to recognize that inherent in what is introduced as divine command to the man, is nothing less than divine instruction that functions to invite the man to become conscious and mindful how, in the particular instance of deciding to eat from the tree of knowledge, his decision will effect a life-transforming outcome. Inherent in the divine warning offered-- that a course of action available to the man will effect results of an ultimate nature – is the intimidating clarity that the divine has in fact authorized humanity not only with the capacity, but also the responsibility, of consciously and mindfully creating the existence humanity will

experience. In essence, the divine impresses upon the man the weight and power of his decisions presuming, as it were, the clear possibility that the man is capable of acting to co-create with God the experience of existence that will be his. At no point in the narrative is the suggestion made that humanity may forego embracing their capacity to co-create existence with the divine, or jettison their ability or responsibility to co-create out of fear or doubt about their capacity or fitness for the sacred vocation. There are no qualifications made by the divine that indicate a limiting of humanity's creative license and authority in co-creating. Genesis 2:16-17 only extends the implicit invitation for the man to be conscious of the extent of power inherent in his decision-making ability. In essence, the divine conveys to the man that the "safety" has been turned off, inviting him to be conscious that human actions have been imbued with the power to effect ultimately effect humanity's experience of existence.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, when later in the same narrative, the woman is depicted as diligently fulfilling her role to partner with the man in being his help. The woman models the powerfully conscious discernment of a *praxis of beauty* that energizes her delight in the *to'v* appropriate, not only to her, but also for her partner. The recognition of the *to'v* potential to be realized in eating of the tree empowers the woman's decision to embrace it. Hers is not an unconscious reaction from unmindful desire. Rather, the narrative makes it clear that the woman is fully aware of the possible outcome associated with eating of the tree, just as Genesis 3:6 informs us that the woman is fully mindful of the highly desirable goodness mediated by the three-fold *to'v* inherent in the tree. The conscious awareness and desire for *to'v* which inspires the woman's decision not only renders it a responsible choice but embodies the power of *erotic faithfulness* to ushering the fulfillment of humanity's vocation as co-creators with the Divine. The woman imitates the divine in her

conscious choice to embrace the *tov* that promises to allow her, and the partner she was called to help, to become “God-bearers” manifesting their likeness of Divine *Eros*.

Whereas the man, when he is alone, is instructed not to take such action, it becomes a different story when the partner who is to be his help, is brought to join him: “two is better than one,” as the wisdom follows. And joined by the wisdom of a third, the good oracular serpent, it becomes possible for the relational partnership of the three to enliven awareness and quicken the awakening of a humanity eager to fulfill its vocation as “God-bearers.” The woman’s exercise of discernment and agency is not only a responsible exercise of the authority given humanity to co-create their existence with God, but presumably in her sharing of the truth she discerns with the man (the text suggests in the woman’s familiarity with God’s command to the man, that between the two there is sufficient sharing of what they know) he is empowered with a kind of permission to exercise the existential agency revealed to be part of his existence back in Genesis 2.16-17. In the confidence of partnership with the one given to him by God, the man (whom we are told is with the woman) also takes on the mantle of authority for his destiny, and accepts the *tov* of his mortality in exchange for the *tov* promised in the fulfillment of his highest vocation.

The wisdom of a similar humble audacity emerges poignantly in the Tolkien epic, *Lord of the the Rings*. In the movie version of *The Two Towers*, the Elrond the Wise entreats his daughter Arwen to leave the coming apocalypse of Middle Earth for the peace and safety of the Havens. They are in conflict over her desire to remain on the slimmest hope of sharing a life with her beloved Aragorn, whose unclear fate is nevertheless bound with that of Middle-earth.¹⁰¹ He begs her to sail on the last Elfin ships leaving for the Undying Lands so

¹⁰¹ In Part V of Appendix A in the *The Return of the King* of *The Lord of the Rings*

she will not face death. Motivated by deep fatherly grief at the prospect of this beloved and only daughter's death, Elrond shows Arwen a vision of the destitution of loss she will suffer in choosing to remain behind on the slimmest hope of sharing a life with King Aragon. The Elfin Lord grimly reminds his daughter, even should her beloved survive to prevent the coming apocalypse of Middle-earth, her own Elfin blood fates her to live thousands of years beyond Aragon's human hundred. As Elrond shares his vision with of her future, Arwen sees her future self, grieving at the grave of a dead Aragon, without consolation: she is destined live out the remainder of her life haunted by a seeming endlessness of days bereft of her Elfin family.

In the movie, despite having pledged her troth to Aragon in Lórian and renounced her inheritance as one of the Eldar and to become mortal, "I will cleave to you Dúnadan, and turn from the Twilight," Arwen is shaken. The prospect of losing both her human love and the Elfin family she loves proves too much and she agrees to depart for the ships at

trilogy, "The Tale of Aragorn and Arwen," tells of Aragorn meeting Arwen in Rivendell and "from that hour on he loved Arwen Undómiel daughter of the Elrond." This happens while Aragon, then the still-young Heir of Isildur, was living under the pseudonym, Estel (or Hope) because his uncle, Elrond the Wise (his deceased father's uncle, and father of Arwen) sought to protect him from the Enemy who was seeking to discover and kill any surviving Heir of Isildur. When they meet again in Lórian, they pledge their troth. But it there is sorry mixed in their joy. For the two to share a life, as Aragon acknowledges, Arwen must renounce "the Twilight." She agrees to yield the gift of her immortality as one of the Eldar, but her acceptance of mortality is pained by the ambivalence of sorrow. She must also then sacrifice all she has known in being loved among the Eldar, "I will cleave to you Dúnadan, and turn from the Twilight. Yet there lies the land of my people and the long home of all my kin."

Elrond is grieved by the choice of his daughter because it results in his great loss. Elrond the Wise is far-seeing and places the gift of a condition upon Aragon, "She shall not be the bride of any Man less than the King of both Gondor and Arnor." Despite this seemingly impossible task put upon her beloved, Arwen is determined to remain with in the land of her Estel, and hence Elrond the Wise pleads with his daughter to reconsider. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings Volume III The Return of the King* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975) 420-428. My thanks to Andrea Fort, who shared with me her exceptional knowledge of Tolkien lore, and to Victor Lee for the same.

Valinor. Yet on the road to the Gray Havens, Arwen comes to a vision that transforms her fear of loss into courage of love: she sees a child running through the forest into the arms of a smiling Aragorn. As she sees that the maturer Aragorn in her vision, Arwen realizes that her father has failed to share with her the whole of the vision of her future: a life of loving with Aragorn that is shared with their son, Eldarion. Quickened by the hope of love-fulfilled, Arwen turns from her fearful fleeing and the security of immortality among those who love her. She chooses to return to Rivendell, willing to share a fate with Middle-earth, empowered by the hope that she and Aragorn may have a chance to create a *tov* that can only be birthed by the fulfillment of their love.

From the perspective of *benevolent creation*,¹⁰² Genesis 3 invites an appreciation of human mortality as a *tov* presumed from humanity's inception, expressing humanity's existential integrity, and vital to preserve for its ability to protecting humanity -- made vulnerable to knowing good and evil through the desire to be faithful -- against an eternity of suffering the loss of *tov*. Recognizing that the virtue of humanity's desire for faithfulness is motivates the woman and the man to embrace that which promises to empower the fulfillment of a sacred vocation ordained for humanity by God, this interpretation of Genesis 3 stands in contrast to traditional interpretations of Genesis 3.22 reading death as either punitive deprivation or just punishment.

Seeing through a paradigm of *benevolent creation*, what might elsewhere rightly be deemed the "severity" of death emerges in the narrative of Genesis 3 as the compassionate gift of divine protection. Mortality remains the consequence of humanity's decision to eat of

¹⁰² As introduced previously, *benevolent creation*, is an understanding of the nature of Creation based on Genesis 1. Benevolent creation maintains the conviction that the whole of Creation, in its entirety, is an expression of divine love.

the tree of knowledge, but rather than an expression of punishment for wrong-doing, it symbolizes provision of benevolent concern. Along with the divine act of clothing humanity with protective animals skins before their exile from Eden, denying humanity access to the tree of life that would cause them to live forever, functions as benevolent protection. The *toiv* of mortality is humanity's reward, protecting humanity against potential immortality and the possibility of interminable suffering introduced by humanity's choice to embrace the faithfulness of authoritative co-creation over the security of undifferentiated obedience.

Thus Genesis 3 ends, confirming that humanity has courageously chosen to accept the certainty of death in order to embrace the consciousness of knowing good and evil needed to manifest the *aletheia* of their highest *toiv*. Having embraced an existence capable of fulfilling their vocation to be "God-bearers," humanity sent forth into exile, equipped and assured of provision that will continue to empower them to be fruitful and multiply and to exercise the authority of co-creating their experience of existence in partnership with the rest of Creation.

When read through the compassion of *benevolent creation*, Genesis 3 shows that departing the potential timelessness of Eden's idyll protects the flourishing of humanity's *toiv*. Indeed, humanity is not lost to blessedness in leaving Eden. Rather, in the protective hospitality of exile, the narrative reads as assuring humanity of divine provision and protection in ways most vital to the fulfillment of their vocational integrity. For the woman, through whose struggle in pregnancy, pain in labor, progeny will multiply, the gift of *teshuqua* energizes her with affection empowering her to multiply their family as only she can. And for the man, whose vocation was to co-create with the divine in tilling and keeping the ground so that it is fruitful, the promise that abundance of harvest will be sufficient for bread until the very end of his days, and provision will flow, not only created by the labor of

his own hands, but discovered flourishing in the wilderness. In such ways, humanity is invited to anticipate the beneficence of Divine Love in their work of co-creating a fruitful and abundance life. The promise of divine hospitality continues beyond Eden, offering humanity the opportunity to learn that the truth of blessedness flows unimpeded even by their knowing good and evil, as the divine continues to preserve humanity with a protective provision and worthy of inspiring the on-going trust and courage of *erotic faithfulness*.

Conclusion

From our introductory discussion of cultural hybridity, we have learned that inhabiting an existence informed by a multiplicity of cultural sources of identity introduces an experience of ambiguity that results not from a lack of clarity, but from an overabundance of clarities that emerge through the plurality of culturally viable and virtuous responses possible for us to embody in any given situation.

Ambiguity does not emerge as an intellectual problem – that is, one to be solved simply by accurate knowledge or getting more information - but rather, as a persistent condition that raises awareness of one’s vulnerability to the finitude – or limits and boundaries – natural to a human existence. Further, as we examined the experience of desire in cultural hybridity, it becomes evident that this possibility of more than one set of cultural values, expectations, practices, and understandings of virtue introduces a profound paralysis of agency precipitated by uncertainty about which cultural expression of virtue is the superlative virtue to embody for a particular context.

At the core of this paralysis of agency is, surprisingly, not the plurality of possible *tois*, but earnest and profound desire. Desire to know the right or best thing to do and, perhaps more profound and persistent -- even urgent -- desire to embody that which will bring us into right relationship with our context. Even at the young age of 4, I was familiar with the power of this profoundly earnest desire to do the right thing. Without articulating it as so, my yearning was to fulfill the highest cultural expectations, to uphold the most honorable cultural virtues. There was no lack of instruction, and no failure of understanding about what constituted virtue, and I wanted to be nothing less than wholly obedient. Yet I failed to fulfill the virtue I desired to uphold that day, despite my abundant understanding.

While the multiple cultural paradigms informing my self-understanding clearly

conveyed what was virtuous and why, as they converged they created a plurality of paths that competed for authority and introduced a conflict of priorities. And because each system of value (as well-taught to me) was thoroughly viable, none emerged as more authoritative than the other. Such experiences of agential paralysis in cultural hybridity reveal the central problem of our finite existence to be generated not by the absence of clarity, nor by the paucity of goodness and beauty, but rather by a crisis of authority encountered as multiple and competing clarities introduce a plurality of competing possibilities of *toiv* that each embody an authoritative virtue.

In cultural hybridity we are confronted with the necessity of discerning what expression of *toiv* is most appropriate for who we are, at any given time. And because the kinds of choices we must make are often decisions that necessitate the tragic diminishment or loss of possibilities of existence that are no less *toiv*, or virtuous, or beneficial than those we have chosen, we discover that disappointment and grief persist even after we have come to an authoritative clarity about what constitutes the highest or best *toiv* for us in a given situation. As such, the choice of one clearly necessitates the elimination of other possibilities that may be no less vital to our flourishing. Thus our examination of desire in cultural hybridity also offers the insight that inhabiting an existence informed by a plurality and multiplicity of *toiv* mediates a condition of ambivalence – a persistent frustration of desire. This ambivalence illumines that we continue to experience a grief or longing for what was lost, even as we affirm the goodness of the decision we have made. Discerned through such experiences of cultural hybridity, we see that in a context of ambiguity and ambivalence, we are not saved either by clarity of knowledge or obedience of will.

Examining desire in experiences of ambiguity and ambivalence in cultural hybridity is also instructive in correcting a misunderstanding about the efficacy of obedience, and its

identification as a cultural and theological virtue. It is a gift of cultural hybridity to expose the limited applications for teachings that insist obedience is a virtue that secures greater virtue.¹⁰³ As an existence structured by the flourishing of multiple ordinances, each giving dignity to worthwhile values and each honoring virtue deserving of praise, cultural hybridity reveals that uncritical practices of obedience disempower our capacity for agential discernment.¹⁰⁴ The story of Eve in Eden illuminates this situation of ambiguity and ambivalence epitomized by experiences of desire in cultural hybridity.

Ambiguity: A Condition For Blessedness

In Genesis 3 ambiguity is interpreted as a condition necessary for cultivating humanity's experience and awareness of blessedness. The ambiguity permitted to develop in the narrative of Genesis 3 is nothing if not instructive. It offers insight into the nature of ambiguity in Creation, as well as the theological significance of ambiguity in the story unfolding through Genesis 3. We discover that ambiguity in the garden develops as the result of a collaborative effort to discern what God has instructed humanity. Together in conversation, what knowing of the divine that is available to the woman and the oracular serpent emerges, reflecting a difference in source and experiences. As they share their

¹⁰³ In such a paradigm, obedience is often established as the highest virtue. Yet in situations where multiple understandings of virtue or the good necessarily co-exist, desire to uphold virtue combined with regard for existing authorities can result in a paralysis of agency – or the inability to act. The false hope of obedience promises that compliance; yet in a context characterized by a plurality of ordinances, the desire for compliance is frustrated not by ignorance but by too many authoritative voices.

¹⁰⁴ Challenging theological paradigms of faithfulness that establish unquestioning obedience as the epitome of human faithfulness, our interpretation of Eve in the Genesis 3 reads a theological critique of compliance, and advocates self-responsible discernment as empowering the *erotic faithfulness* that allows humanity to realize the vocation of responsible co-creation with the divine.

divergent understandings of what God intends for humanity, ambiguity emerges. Born of an earnest desire to discern the truth of how to be faithful to the Divine, and expressed as a collaborative effort to speak one's truth as it is known, Genesis 3 allows the divergent knowing of the serpent and the man to be presented for the woman's consideration. This convergence of the unlike perspectives introduces a profound uncertainty that challenges the authority of each perspective.

We hear echoes of what has been discerned in our earlier analysis of desire in cultural hybridity. That reflection enabled the recognition that ambiguity is never merely the intellectual experience of lacking clarity. In cultural hybridity, ambiguity emerges as an emotionally powerful experience of desire paralyzed by the fear of too many choices and insufficient clarity. In this experience of anxiety, the presence of many viable, and therefore competing, choices triggers the paralyzing fear of losing what one wants. So where informed by a multiplicity of compelling options, ambiguity manifests as an anxiety about lack of clarity, expressed as a paralysis of choice about how to engage ourselves most faithfully in relationship to others.

Moreover, the inability to pinpoint the source or first cause of ambiguity in the narrative invites us to embrace the (startling) recognition that ambiguity is inherently a part of the human condition known in Eden. It is not a particular feature in a situation that triggers "the problem" of ambiguity. Rather, ambiguity functions more as "a problematic," or what we have recognized Edward Farley as conceptualizing as a "perduring condition," revealed through, and revealing, the vulnerabilities inherent in the relational dynamic of communication in Creation. The narrative suggests that in Creation even our most earnest and sincerely motivated communications reveal a vulnerability to random and unpredictable distortions. Thus, despite the clear faithfulness evidenced in the woman adding her own

clause to emphasize her appreciation of, and desire to honor, the spirit of God's instructions against eating of the tree, we see that in Creation, "intention" simply does not protect or secure communications in Creation against inevitable distortions in content, meaning, or purpose.

Desire to convey a message or meaning faithfully does not guarantee that nuances in emphases, distinctions and other subtleties will translate identically, or even transmit the desired communication clearly or effectively. This possibility of a disconnect between the energy of intention invested by someone, and any immediately or even recognizable result, introduces an epistemological tension important for understanding a central conviction of this chapter about the function of ambiguity in Creation.

In as much as ambiguity fundamentally limits our ability to know anything with certainty, it turns out, time and again, that ambiguity also functions as a crucible of sorts for desire.¹ Thus the experience of frustrations around that we do not or cannot know, and what we cannot achieve as a matter of desire and willing nevertheless empower a different insight about the nature of desire as it is shaped by the same context. Indeed, desire emerges no less diffused or neutralized by the experiences of ambiguity: not finding what we long for, and having the hope of clarity deferred, our desire becomes all the more poignant, sharpened by a hunger for its absence.² Moreover, desire, however faithful in intent, is not revealed to have the power to effect the securing a particular outcome. This clarity is subtle yet stubborn throughout Genesis 3. Rather, desire is that which energizes yearning, and cultivates a faithfulness that does not ultimately betray the truth of one's *tov*.

As the narrative offers this important commentary on the limited effectiveness of desire, an equally subtle and significant lesson on the nature of faithfulness emerges.

Genesis 3 makes clear that the "reward" of faithful intention, as such, does not immediately

or necessarily secure an outcome free of ambiguity and ambivalence, as if virtue protected against experience of struggle or suffering. Filtered through the fundamental theological claim that every dimension of Creation reveals the truth of *toῦ*, how do such insights about the causes and effects of ambiguity inform our appreciation of the nature of beauty and goodness in Creation? As the *toῦ* of ambiguity exposes the random vulnerabilities inherent in the nature of communications and knowledge in Creation, our interpretation embraces the awareness that even this condition of limited partial knowing empowers the resilience of our desire for truth in connection. In the absence of clarity, we discover the truth that our desiring is not contingent upon clarity.

Like the flowing water of a river that encounters an obstacle, ambiguity reveals that desire refuses to be trumped by any lack of clarity. Instead, like flowing water, desire does not resist when it encounters obstacles, but takes even struggle to part of its journey as it persists until it overwhelms the lack, and presses on towards the beauty and goodness that it seeks. The gift of ambiguity in the narrative functions to remind us how, in all relationships, there remain profoundly unknowable dimensions existing that elude detection by even those closest intimacies of relationship, or the most conscious efforts in self-observation. Such limits naturally contribute to the vulnerability of our self-understandings and our understandings of others.²

The Gift of Yet Another Truth

The good serpent's words, "you will not die," introduce the possibility of an alternative *toῦ*. The woman's choice will not only cause the expression of humanity's highest *toῦ*, but usher in the realization of humanity's greatest vulnerabilities. Poised on the cusp of destiny, the woman's decision is set to transform truth into life, to birth the wholeness in

humanity's existence. What is it about this introduction of another epistemological truth that evoked the force of consideration sufficient enough alter the trajectory of humanity's relationship with God ever after? Was it the woman's desire for the compelling three-fold *toḅ* her attentiveness discerns? Is it that hope made explicit in the good serpent's oracle: the promise of *aletheia*, the truth-in-being manifest in the fulfillment of her *becoming*? What compels the woman's decision?

Interestingly, the good serpent's words in Genesis 3 expose how the clarity of knowledge – which once offered the certainty that the *toḅ* of obedience would save humanity from experiencing death -- is itself transient and vulnerable to obsolescence in finitude. This is emphasized as the good serpent speaks from, and of, an alternative clarity, sharing knowledge that humanity's truest nature (the serpent uses a common plural pronoun, indicating its remarks address an audience beyond the singular woman) will be realized in eating of "the tree." Partnership with the *toḅ* of the tree will empower a knowing of good and evil that will make humanity "like God."¹⁰⁵ Nor is the good serpent shy about exposing the incompleteness of the woman's knowing (and inadvertently, the man's). It exercises the necessary prudence of *'arum* to prevent humanity from failing to realize its vocation as "God-bearers."¹⁰⁶

Read through *erotic faithfulness*, the seriousness of what is at stake – the fulfillment of humanity's vocation to be God-bearers – compels the woman to contemplate the truth of

¹⁰⁵ Again, it is not clear whether "the tree in the middle of the garden" the woman has made reference to is the same as the tree that the serpent posits will empower humanity with the knowing of good and evil that makes them like God.

¹⁰⁶ The prudence of *'arum*, as used throughout the Proverbs, depicts an anticipatory knowing not only capable of securing the good, but perhaps more importantly, of saving the prudent one from falling into harm. Prudence guides action that avoids unforeseen dangers, even preventing the tragic or the catastrophic ruin --whether spiritual, communal, financial, etc.

the serpent's words about the *tov* of the tree. Given how clearly the woman knows the divine warning associated with eating of the tree, her act of contemplation illumines the quality of courageous responsibility inherent in the woman's determination to discern the truth of the matter.¹⁰⁷ The woman does not embrace the deceptive security of passive acceptance, nor is she content to know through another what she is able to discern for herself. And in her practice of seeing the *tov* in Creation, the woman discovers the value of the tree to her. She discerns how partnership with the tree is destined to empower the fullest *tov* of each and all. Even so, the woman is not merely the prudence of *'arum* –that critical virtue of discernment which imparts the anticipatory ability to anticipate the good – but rather, engaging in the very *praxis of beauty*, that faithful practice of seeing the *tov* within Creation associated with the Divine in Genesis 1. Like God, whose delighting in the *tov* of Creation is expressed in the practice of relationship, the woman will settle for nothing less than embracing the *tov* of the tree with delight in imitation of the Divine. But we will return to this point later.

The limited usefulness of clarity is readily apparent as we consider the decision facing the woman: one choice prevents humanity from expressing the faithfulness of obeying God's instruction, the other prevents humanity from the faithfulness of fulfilling its vocation to become like God. Both paths are backed by credible divine endorsement. Neither choice lacks the promise of virtue capable of answering the human desire to be faithful. Thus Genesis 3 helps us realize that the woman's desire for clarity cannot answer the

¹⁰⁷ Significantly, there is no indication that she questions the veracity of the Divine warning – she does not first discount her past learning about the consequence of death before contemplating the value of the tree's *tov* for her own fulfillment. Nor is the woman presented as blaming the man for the vulnerability of incompleteness characterizing the knowledge he has presumably shared with her.

ambiguity that confronts her. While desire for the good yields the truth that both paths are inherently *tov*, such knowledge only confirms that what is desired is good – it does not offer the woman any certainty about which *tov* is the best to embrace. Which *tov* represents the woman’s highest *tov*, and her fullest truth, and her most beautiful virtue? In this sense, clarity is the culprit that introduces another dimension of complexity through which to explore human desire when a multiplicity of *tov* is encountered.

If all is good, how is the woman to decide which *tov* to seek? It is the gift of finitude to reveal that when the terms for fulfilling one virtue necessarily violate the terms needed to fulfill another, it is not possible (is it necessary?) for both expressions of *tov* to be realized simultaneously. Clear and certain knowledge of what is *tov*, even while able to confirm that what is desired is good, fails to provide the basis for establishing virtue when desire stands at a crossroads facing multiple truths.

The Inadequacy of Obedience

So it is to the theme of human disobedience that the lens of benevolent creation contributes one of its most transformative insights. Read through an understanding of benevolent creation, Genesis 3 not only challenges traditional understandings of obedience as virtue, but implicitly exposes the inadequacy of compliance for confirming the truth of virtue in desire. A corrective to those traditional theological anthropologies determined to argue that an insufficient desire to be obedient was core to humanity’s Fall into the culpability of disobedience, Genesis 3 offers a much-needed theological critique of patriarchal suggestions that obedience epitomizes the virtue of faithfulness.

Viewed through a desire to know the truth about the nature of human faithfulness

towards the Divine, the narrative depiction of the woman's situation definitively exposes a critical vulnerability imbedded in the very strength of her desire to be obedient, virtuous, faithful. The intention to do the right thing, expressed in the desire to choose virtuously, becomes the source of paralyzing indecision when confronted by a context replete with multiple, credible, competing expressions of *tov*. In contradiction of traditional arguments, what is made evident through Genesis 3 is how it is very desire to do the right thing that leads to a paralysis of decision. The very clarity that makes manifest the truth of the numerous and diverse expressions of virtue possible offers no way of mediating between the competing expressions of *tov*.

Virtue and The Problem of Clarity

In the context of benevolent creation, even the truth of knowledge fails to deliver the clarity hoped for and expected. The clarity that all is *tov* serves to obscure whether a desire is virtuous by merit of the fact that the object of desire is deemed *tov* and worth desiring. So by presenting multiple expressions of *tov* and honoring each as uniquely contributing to the perfection of all in the whole, the truth of benevolent creation reveals that one choice is as virtuous as another: if all is *tov*, it is possible to encounter virtue in each or every expression of *tov* desired. So then how can the nature of desire itself be determined? How can we discern whether a desire is virtuous or not when, distinctions between what is desired (that is to say, the virtue represented by the object of desire) are eliminated from the equation? What criteria determines the virtue of desire? How is the *virtue* of desire established beyond the clarity that each *tov* desired is virtuous? Indeed, what emerges as faithfulness of desire in the face of competing understandings of *tov*?

Ambivalence

All the while, the partnership of finitude and multiplicity in benevolent creation generates a paralyzing ambivalence that cannot be resolved by the mere knowledge of what is or is not *tov*. Ambivalence constitutes an awareness that yields another crucial theological insight about the nature of desire in finitude. Ambivalence is the experience of discovering that the choice to embrace one expression of *tov* necessitates an inevitable loss of another *tov*. Thus even when the “rightness” or appropriateness of the “best” choices are made, there is no relief from the suffering mediated by knowing that some other precious *tov* could not be permitted to manifest. Exposing the relationship between desire and finitude is the theological gift of ambivalence as it refutes simplistic suggestions that faithfulness delivers us from suffering, and secures us against loss. Exposing the limits of clarity transforming our experience of desire, the still-less satisfying experience of ambivalence offers the theological recognition that the desire for *tov*, no matter how accurately discerned and rightly chosen, indeed, no matter how virtuous, does not, and cannot prevent or protect the faithful against suffering.

In the context of cultural hybridity, ambivalence is the experience that expresses the truth of regret of loss that comes to mark our experience of that which we deem good and beautiful, yet cannot prioritize into its fullest existence. Even after a choice that is clearly appropriate alleviates the confusion of ambiguity, ambivalence emerges as an awareness of the insufficiency of clarity to assuage our desire for the good. Ambivalence, therefore, allows us to embrace our grief and any residual remorse lingering over the potential expressions of good and beauty we could not endorse or embrace for whatever reasons. For

this reason, ambivalence comes to dignify our persisting desire for the connection to the good lost to us; it is ambivalence that allows us to continue valuing even that which we did not or could not prioritize as most organic to the fulfillment of our desire for the good and beautiful.

In this way, the condition of cultural hybridity illumines the intensely poignant nature of human existence as a continuous practice of self-definition that invariably requires us to deliberate and choose the truth of personhood that we will manifest. Cultural hybridity requires us to recognize how human existence is as much a practice of self-limitation, as it is of creative manifestation, simply because the affirmation of one expression of personhood necessitates that we forgo the expression of another valued expression of goodness inherent within us.

Such experiences of ambivalence in cultural hybridity confront us with the haunting awareness that no matter the goodness we may be enjoying, neither the personhood we are manifesting nor the particular experiences we have chosen to have manage to exhaust the manifold possibilities of goodness and beauty we could not honor. Ambivalence refuses to offer us the false comfort of believing that our particular form of goodness or the beauty expressed by our being exhausts the possibility of desirable goodness and beauty in existence. In this sense, then, ambivalence functions as that discontent which stimulates our desire for the goodness and beauty beyond ourselves.

Thus, virtue does not emerge to be lassoed into submission by the promise of prevention of loss, or protection against grief. The narrative does not indulge the fantasy that love of truth -- whether expressed as desire for highest *tov* or faithfulness to virtue -- prevents pain, and protects against suffering and loss. Rather, the difficult clarity Genesis 3 introduces is that virtue is in fact be a source of the very things more fearful theological

perspectives have promised it prevents. But such theological honesty is refreshing. Its courage to speak truthfully of how profoundly interconnected and therefore complex existence is offers the much-needed promise of a perspective sufficiently trustworthy to navigate with, as we stumble through an ferocious existence as stunning with beauty as it is terrifyingly in fragility. Genesis 3 refuses to pretend that existence in finitude can be secured against persistent loss and profound grief; yet with equal tenacity, the narrative stubbornly insists that divine love has filled existence with the inescapable evidence of enduring benevolence and abundant provision.

A Praxis of Beauty

Against a backdrop of divine warning that eating of the tree in the middle of the garden will result in death, humanity embraces the faithful practice of hospitality towards the tree, regardless of consequence to itself. In this, humanity can be seen as forgoing self-protective withholding; humanity chooses to eat of the fruit of the tree, faithfully extending the blessing of hospitable relationship and embracing the fulfillment of the manifold *tov* discerned within the tree. The “benefit” of the three-fold *tov*, while unquestionably *tov*, comes at no small cost: humanity is fully aware of the divine warning that in eating of the tree they will die. For this reason, where virtue is defined as choosing the good for the sake of the good without promise of any other reward, out of the economy of finitude which orders all created existence emerges humanity as modeling the virtue of humility. That humanity persists in seeking its fullest *tov* given the necessity of embracing mortality is resonant of the devotion of faithful loving evidenced in the self-limitation at the heart of the divine hospitality that begets the gift of Creation. We see the loving self-limitation that energizes God’s sharing of existence with the Other in Creation echoed by humanity. In the

woman and man's knowing acceptance of a limited existence in order to offer hospitality to the fulfillment of a greater truth of loving faithfulness imitates the divine after which humanity has been designed. Genesis 3 depicts humanity as faithful to God in sharing a life-giving hospitality towards the *tov* inherent within the tree, even embracing the necessary self-limitation of finitude in order to do so.

Thus in her attentive *praxis of beauty* – in the seeing and delighting of the *tov* in Creation modeled by God in Genesis 1 – it is the woman's love for the divine hope of *tov* within herself and the man that vindicates her decision as virtuous. The woman's discernment of *tov* potent in the tree of knowledge, and her choice to partner with the tree to realize the mutual *tov* promised reveals the manner in which the woman faithfully bears the likeness of God. Far from signaling a faithless disregard for God's authority, the woman's choice to embrace that which is her highest *tov*, fully conscious of the mortality consequent upon her decision, bears witness to the virtue of faithfulness. The woman courageously seeks the good for the very sake of the good. It is not from accidental ignorance but with willingly acceptance of the loss promised to be consequent upon her choice seek the good.

The certainty of mortality fails to mar the striking revelation that in her *praxis of beauty*, the woman enables humanity to imitate the benevolence of loving relationality ascribed to God throughout Genesis 1 – the seeing and delighting in the *tov* of Creation. Thus Genesis 3 presents the woman as inaugurating humanity's vocation as "God-bearers," as she realizes humanity's capacity to manifest the likeness to the divine. And for her faithfulness, the woman is fully deserving of the name Eve. She is rightfully honored as "mother of all living" for faithfully embracing the *praxis of beauty* that inaugurates humanity's likeness of God. (Genesis 1.26)

Genesis 3 offers the profoundly hospitable perception that love for the truth of

one's *tov* and faithful intention inform the virtuous desire that prompted humanity to eat what promised death. Indeed, despite the clear awareness that dying is expected to follow from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, the woman does not back away from the hope of *aletheia*, truth-in-being, promised. It is in fact the clear vulnerability of the woman's knowledge that allows the narrative to make the virtue of her decision (and the nature of her desire in making the decision) stand out all the more.¹⁰⁸ Confronted by precious but potential *tov* promised in the good serpent's truth, the woman must make a decision between two mutually exclusive/incompatible understandings of virtue. Her situation teaches how, at times, far from securing us against the pain of loss and the suffering of lack, our desire for faithfulness or virtue presents us with the opportunity that brings us face to face with the very pain and loss obedience was promised to prevent. The woman, and indeed humanity, chooses that which will empower the fulfillment of humanity's capacity to bear the likeness of God mediated through the knowledge of good and evil. But in the process, they consciously lose the possibility of living forever embedded in the promise that mortality

¹⁰⁸ If the theological anthropology of the verse and the chapter in general implies such a remarkable capacity is both organic to humanity's nature -- original to God's design for humanity (Genesis 1. 26-27) -- why is the same pathologized by traditional interpretations? If indeed humanity was designed to bear the likeness of God according to Genesis 1.26-27, what blame does the serpent deserve for offering the knowledge that makes humanity aware; and what fault should be assigned humanity for choosing to pursue such a path? And if the narrative depicts humanity choosing the *tov* of being like God, despite the loss of reward, and promise of certain death (significantly, however, death is never described as, or associated with, punishment throughout Genesis 3), then the virtue of such a decision, and the desire that motivates it, becomes more evident. The truth of virtue is confirmed in a choice that chooses what is *tov* for the sake of the good, un-dissuaded by either the distraction of reward, or the threat of punishment, to compromise. In this way, the corrective vision of benevolent creation makes it possible to see that neither fear of death, nor promise of life persuades the woman to ignore the truth of *tov* promised (the *tov* of the tree will make humanity like God). Indeed, that the virtue of the woman's desire becomes evident in that she refuses to walk away from the hope of *aletheia*, truth-in-being, she discerned in the tree, despite the clear awareness that dying remains the "reward" for eating of the tree.

follows their decision to eat of the tree of knowledge. It is the desire for faithfulness that compels the woman to embrace the promise of one *tov*, even as it is promised to deliver the loss of another experience of *tov*, also precious.

Choosing virtue and the seeking faithfulness does not necessarily secure us against the loss of *tov* and related suffering. The gift of ambiguity teaches us that rather than a lack of desire to do the right thing, it can be an *abundance* of the *tov* and desire for the good that actually precipitates the very suffering that traditional interpretations of Genesis 3 insist could have been avoided if there had been sufficient desire for the *tov* of obedience. To the false hope of the latter, Genesis 3 offers the uncomfortable reminder that mere desire for obedience does not guarantee either virtue in motivation or desire.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ There is a lesson in all this about the vulnerability of clarity. Rather than being the solution that brings an end to the quest of desire, it is evident that clarity in the form of knowledge of what is true functions *in the service of* a more final vision of human flourishing and fulfillment, rather than as an ultimate end that provides a final destination for desire, in and of itself. Genesis 3.3-4 reveals that while the optimism of clarity brightly promises to dispel the ambiguity inherent in the desire for truth by offering the concrete or clear knowledge, our encounter with truth of multiple expressions of *tov* reveals clarity to be limited in its ability to deliver that which can fulfill humanity's most enduring desire.

It is in fact the intelligence of unfulfilled longing driving desire restlessly, refusing to be content with anything less than the highest *tov*, that illumines that clarity "merely" brings knowledge of a more fundamental and compelling desire to *become* the truth of one's being, through act and deed that bring about the existential integrity of *aletheia*. Thus, the woman's *eros* to bear the divine likeness organic to her being emerges as that critical *tov* energizing a

Against the questionable clarity of such deceptive theological promises, the woman's desire to be faithful glows with luminous promise. The woman emerges virtuous because she chooses the highest *tov* of bearing the likeness of the divine, even against the promise of certain death. The significance of this must not be lost: she seeks the good, for the sake of the good. It is as the woman chooses to forego the security promised in the lesser *tov* of compliance (which would insure that she, at least, does not suffer the fate of mortality) it becomes possible to recognize the truth of faithfulness in the woman's courage to pay the cost of mortality for the sake of embracing her highest *tov*. This is because what constitutes truth of virtue is a choice to choose the good for the sake of the good. And there can be no certainty of whether a choice was virtuous where the choice to choose the good is mediated through the threat of punishment or promise of reward. Such conditions render it impossible to discern whether the motive for the choosing the good was avoidance of harm, gain of benefit, or the desire of devotion for the good itself.

The Truth of Virtue: Beyond Punishment and Reward

The truth of the woman's virtue emerges clearly in Genesis 3. This is in part because despite the cost of losing the *tov* of existence, the woman steadfastly seeks that higher *tov* that promises to help her fulfill the vocation for which she was created. She will eat so that in

desire which stumbles past all lesser *tov* -- regardless of cost to self and life -- until, at last she recognizes a beauty and goodness deserving of the full force of her creative choice. The woman reveals that when truth of *tov* is partnered with desire for the highest *tov* of embracing the divine likeness potent within her, the power of choice imbues humanity with capacity to imitate God in creating the *tov* in existence.

knowing good and evil, she can become a “God-bearer,” bearing the likeness of God as God intended that she should. Rather than inhabiting an existence bereft of the promise or possibility of fulfilling her highest *tov*, the woman embraces mortality knowing that while her choice deprives her of one *tov*, the faithfulness of her desire assures her that she will know the fulfillment of a better *tov*.

There are several securities the woman must forego in her decision. The command that God gave the man, not to eat, was one she had embraced for herself. She had authorized it as having power over her experience of existence, and known the security of compliance. But upon introduction to yet another possibility of *tov* for her existence, the woman has the wisdom to allow the truth shared by the serpent to also have authority in her consideration of what will shape her existence. Ultimately it is the woman who imbues both the command heard by the man, and the good serpent’s oracular knowing, with the power to be authoritative in her life.

This insight allows us to recognize that the woman is simply continuing to exercise her agential capacities with the same diligence when she takes it upon herself to discern the truth of the goodness that the tree of knowledge of good and evil holds for her. And having become cognizant of the *tov* potent for her through the tree of knowledge, the woman continues to engage her agency responsibly when she allows her desire for the new-found *tov* of the tree to have sufficient authority to inspire her decision to eat of the tree. She does not rely on the man’s understanding of God, or the serpent’s knowing of God, but takes responsibility for her own knowing of what is her highest and best *tov* in embracing relationship with the tree. She discerns among competing authorities that which will enliven the truest *tov* for her existence, and then exercises the agency imparted to her to create her experience of existence (to the point of taking responsibility for confirming her mortality).

When she acts, it is clear that Eve embraces a relationship that she knows will fulfill the flourishing of *toiv* in her existence. Thus she acts as one with authority, not merely to authorize others to have authority in her life, but to author her own process of understanding and to authorize the particular *toiv* that will flourish in her life. For this reason -- her discerning with unflinching courage and embracing with faithfulness of desire that which empowers the flourishing of the highest *toiv* of her existence -- Genesis 3 deems the woman to be deserving of the name, Eve, “mother of all living.”

Eve inaugurates humanity’s vocation as “God-bearer.” She demonstrates the God-like power of responsible and conscious agency to empower the truth of her highest *toiv*, as she navigates a context conditioned by ambiguity and ambivalence. Read through a Farleyan understanding of contemplative *eros*, Eve’s *praxis of beauty* demonstrates how the practice of contemplative *eros* not only awakens our consciousness of the sacredness in our experiences, but also awakens the very sacredness that is ours through the sanctity of a human existence.

In the *erotic faithfulness* she models, Eve’s example is an invitation to us. Recognizing Eden as a context shaped by ambiguity and ambivalence, the courageous discernment and decision demonstrated by Eve expresses an existential integrity appropriate for cultural hybrids. Genesis 3 shows cultural hybridity to be a human condition, not only capable of revealing the vulnerabilities of finitude that structure of all human existence, but also potent with the creative power to generate a sacramental existence.

Like Eve, we are invited to discern between competing authorities that understanding of virtuous existence that corresponds with our highest *toiv*. Like Eve, we are invited to imitate God in calling forth the *toiv* we desire through the appreciative embrace of appropriate relationship. And like Eve, we are invited to honor our partnerships with the otherness – whether our interior otherness or the Other/s external to us – by sharing what

tov we find compelling. Through Eve, the Divine authorizes us to embrace our vocation as agents of co-creation, and to practice responsible and conscious choices for the shaping of our experience of existence, as we call forth our highest *tov*. Thus, the story of *eros* in Eden teaches that we are transformed into the very sacraments that mediate the presence of divine hospitality in Creation. Through the integrity of desiring discernment and the courageous embrace of our highest *tov* we fulfill our vocation as “God-bearers,” faithfully manifesting the likeness of the Divine who invites us to be co-creators.

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Appendix A

A Korean Immigrant Family: the story of Chang-Yull Kim and his family.¹¹⁰
By Chang-Yull Kim

1. In Manchuria

Kim is our surname. One fifth of the total Korean population shares this same surname. Kim signifies “gold” in the Chinese character. It is said that the ancestor of the Kim’s family was a king born out of a golden egg.

My father and mother had moved from the North Korea to adjacent Manchuria (northeast China) in their early childhood, because it was heavily populated with Korean immigrants. That is how they met and married.¹¹¹ My father was a schoolteacher in Manchuria. But later he studied at the Methodist Seminary in Seoul, and returned to Manchuria to establish a church for Korean residents in Jang Chun, then the capital city of Manchuria. I was born in Yong Jung, the southeast part of Manchuria on February 20th (we used to observe birthdays according to the lunar calendar) in 1932. My father had six sons and four daughters. Three of my four sisters passed away before I was born, the fourth sister, Aejah, died of pneumonia when I was young. I was the third son.

The government of Manchuria was a puppet government controlled by the Japanese military. The nation of Manchuria consisted of five main races – Chinese indigenous people, Japanese moved from Japan, Koreans moved from North Korea, (White) Russians who had fled from the communist revolution, and Mongolians. But the Chinese nationals were treated as the third nation in their own country. The Japanese enjoyed their life with privileges followed by Koreans. Korea had been annexed to Japan against her will, so Koreans were oppressed by the Japanese and treated as their colonial people.

There was only one primary school for Koreans in Jang Chun. As my birth month was February, I was admitted to a primary school in April at the age of seven (six in the American way of counting age, for Koreans count age by calendar year—everyone becomes one year older on the New Year’ Day before one’s birthday). According to the Japanese colonial policy, we were not allowed to speak the Korean language at school, and a daily record was kept in class of which pupils spoke Korean words and how many times. Under the military rule of the Japanese, who were desperate in their efforts to colonize us, Koreans were forced to give up their family names and were assigned new Japanese-style family names.

Generally speaking, Korean names have one syllable (one Chinese character) for surname and two syllables for the given names, as Chinese people do. The surname (last name) comes first followed by the given name (first name). My family has “Kim” as the surname, and the given names of my brothers are two syllables (Chinese character

¹¹⁰ This narrative was written by my father, and lightly proofed by my sister, Gobi Kim, at my request. I desired to include a fuller accounting of his experiences and their telling, as I heard them through my life, so that they might provide a richer background for my references to our family’s collective memory. He wrote through many days and even some nights, and I am deeply grateful for his labors. Thank you, Dad.

equivalent) Chang-Kook, Chang-Kwon, Chang-Yull, Chang-Duck, Chang-Kil and Chang-Lim. The first half of the first name is common “Chang” in our brothers, and the latter half of the first name is purely an individual one.

But the Japanese names are different, and they have two syllables or three syllables for the surname, and multiple syllables for the first name. So Koreans were forced to adopt similar Japanese surname or coined their own family name. Our newly adopted family name under the Japanese rule was “Kane-Wumi”. The Chinese characters mean “Golden Sea” which is the name of our clan’s origin. My first name under the Japanese rule had become “Show-Lets” which is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters of my first name. So my full name was Kane-Wumi Show-Lets.

Even inside the church wall, the Japanese forced us to hang a screen with a picture of the Japanese Imperial palace with the imperial instructing statement. As World War II approached the end, Japanese persecution and oppression were increasing. At the daily-school morning ceremony, all school children are forced to worship toward the east where the Japanese Imperial palace is situated in Japan, and once a month all school children must pay a visit to the Japanese shrine to pray for them to win the war.

When I was in the fourth grade, I fell off the iron bar used for gymnastics practices and I was hospitalized at the Manchurian Railway Hospital, the best hospital in the city and run by the Japanese. Lying in the surgical operation bed, I was scared about the upcoming surgical operation. I prayed to God, remembering my father’s words that I would feel no pain if I pray hard to Him. As the surgery went on my praying voice became louder, for my pain became greater and greater when the doctors started to chisel the rotten part of my rib. During wartime no amnesiac medicine was available to civilians so I was conscious throughout the operation. As the pain became severe, my praying voice turned to screaming, and sure that I was dying, I started to shout, calling for my father: “Daddy, help me! The doctors are trying to kill me!” One doctor came to me saying, “I will cut out your mouth if you don’t stop yelling”. When I came out I saw my father praying on a bench in the hallway. He told me, “Chang-Yull, I have a custard cake for you.” It was a big treat to me, for I have never had such a luxurious treat in my life. But at that moment, I had no appetite because of my severe pain. In spite of the operation, I did not get well, and I had a second operation. But it was of no use. There were no antibiotics or good medicines available, and the damage to my ribs was severe. Finally my father took me to Seoul, Korea, and was hospitalized in the Seoul National University Hospital -- which was known as the best hospital. I recovered my health after the third surgical operation. The treatment of my injury took me out of school for one year. Because of those experiences I cannot forget my father’s love. Later on I was told it was the first time they saw my father weep.

There was no regular middle school (junior high school) for Koreans in the city. There were three middle schools for Japanese boys and three for Japanese girls. Naturally the competitions for Korean pupils to advance to middle school was very severe. For each grade in primary school, there were three classes – one for boys, another for girls, and the third mixed class. Only several graduates out of some 200 students were able to advance to a middle school. I was fortunate to be one of them.

My education was interrupted by the invasion of Russian troops from the north in 1945. My parents stayed in the capital city, but we children took refuge fleeing to the suburbs. The weakened Japanese occupying army could not defend their claims against the Russian troops. When Russian tanks rolled into the area, we returned home. As returning refugees, we witnessed many Japanese being attacked and killed by Chinese mobs in the Japanese Pioneer’s Villages. (Those pioneer villages were formed by farmers brought from

Japan, and many privileges were given to them.) Their property was plundered by outraged Chinese. These unfortunate Japanese paid the price for their nation's exploitation of the Chinese people.

While the Russian army occupied our city, many people were robbed of their possessions by savage Russian soldiers. They said those soldiers were not regular soldiers but released from prison to attack Japanese army. I saw one Russian soldier's arm which was fully covered by confiscated wristwatches, and I saw a Russian soldier tried to catch a Japanese girl that he tried to sell at a restaurant. Women were attacked by Russian soldiers on the street, even in daylight. So women cut their long hair short and wore men's clothing in hopes of escaping the notice of the Russian soldiers. People covered the windows of their houses with hard boards to prevent break-in by Russian soldiers. The reports of gunshots were constantly heard in the city day and night. Russian troops were not as effective in maintaining the order, so as the Japanese-sponsored Manchurian government was crumbling, and Russian troops occupied the capital city, people could not maintain ordinary living in such an unstable and troubled environment.

There were three Korean churches in that city – a Presbyterian church, a Methodist, and a Korean United church of Manchuria, which my father was serving. The size of the congregation was small (less than thirty families) and they had low income. We had to find a way to support our own living. Once we ran a small grocery store, at another time a shoe store, and later a municipal outlet store for flour, sugar, vegetable oil and supplies. My mother did sewing and washing jobs for a side income. In spite of the hard living, our family led a happy life until the end of World War II in 1945.

When Korea was liberated from the Japanese occupation at the end of World War II, my father and mother persuaded their congregation to migrate to Seoul, the capital city of Korea. Their new church voted to have an affiliation with the Presbyterian Church, which was the largest denomination in Korea. Thus he became the minister of a Presbyterian church.

2. Moving South to the Fatherland Korea

In contrast to the pessimistic situation, Koreans conceived a new hope for the fatherland, which had been liberated from 36 years of Japan's oppressions. The loss of war by the Japanese put the full stop to the Japan's colonization.

The congregation of our church had decided to return to our liberated fatherland Korea. There was no train running on a regular schedule. Many Koreans got together and chartered a train to return to Korea. The train did not run continuously, and whenever the train stopped, people had to collect watches or valuables to give train engineers to keep going on. Normally it's only a half-day's distance by a fast train, but it took more than three days to get to the Korean border. We had crossed the Yalu River and traveled through North Korea, and finally we approached the 38th parallel line, which is the border dividing North and South Korea. We crossed the border guarded by Russian soldiers and North Korean security guards on foot, overnight, hiring a guide who was familiar with the locations where Russian troops were not guarding. At last we reached South Korea where the United States forces were occupying. We were welcomed by American MPs, who sprayed DDT inside our clothes before allowing us to join a refugee camp. We were so glad to reach our motherland finally – and safely.

There was confusion in Seoul also. Some wise Koreans tried to occupy houses vacated by fleeing Japanese. But there was no violence, as there was in Manchuria, and

Koreans allowed the war-defeated Japanese to return to their homeland in a peaceful manner. Once again in Seoul, my father established a church with the refugees he and my mother had brought safely from Manchuria. First, we used the auditorium of the Seoul YMCA as our worship place. The general secretary of the YMCA was Rev. Seong Ok Byun who was a Methodist minister graduated from the Pacific School of Religion and was a close friend of our father. He was the dean of the Jilin Theological Seminary with the same denomination as my father in Manchuria. Our church in Manchuria was interdenominational, but in Korea we felt a necessity to belong to a denomination, and the congregation voted to be Presbyterian, which was the most popular denomination in Korea at that time. And following the intention of his congregation, my father became a pastor of a Presbyterian church, though he had graduated from a Methodist seminary in Seoul.

Our church had a small congregation of refugees from China, and their income is moderate also. Naturally the salary from the church for our father was not enough to support our family – we six sons were all students and did not produce any income.

The free education was up to the sixth grade of primary school at that time in Korea. We were required to pay tuition for our education at middle school and high school. When students did not pay their tuition in due time, their names were dropped from the roll call in classes. We had experienced several terms that our name was not called in class though we were present in the classroom, because we could not pay our tuition before the deadline.

Summer vacation was supposed to be an enjoyable season for most students, but to us it meant painful experiences. We had to work to make some money for our living and tuition. We sold newspapers at bus stops or a railway station; we sold food, candies or clothing on the streets or in marketplaces. Our living place was not large in the refugee community. There was only one room for eight members of the family – no study room, no kitchen, no living room, nor separate bedrooms.

Having being inspired by such unfavorable environments, we studied very, very hard. After school we used to go to the municipal library directly and studied there until its closing time 9 pm. My brother Chang-Kwon was an excellent student and an honor student all the time at school. At one academic award ceremony of the junior high school, he was chosen as the representative of all honor students to receive the award from the principal. I was an honor student for the first time in my life in grade 9, and I was fortunate to pass the exam to skip one year. I graduated from the Pai Chai High School (which was the oldest school in Korea established by an American Methodist missionary, Dr. D. Appenzeller) in the same year as my elder brother.

After graduation, I applied for the Theological College of Yonsei University, which was established by an American Presbyterian missionary Dr. Underwood. My brother Chang-Kwon was admitted to Seoul National University, the most prestigious school in Korea, to be in their pre-med program. Less than a month into our university studies, the Korean War broke out, and we were invaded by communist forces from the north. Our education was temporarily discontinued.

3. Outbreak of the Korean War

When the artillery fires shook the ground, the streets of Seoul were crowded with refugees going south. People in Seoul were frantic to take refuge. My mother wanted to have our family take refuge in the south also. We were afraid that communists would kill church ministers if they took power in view of the fact that the communists had arrested and executed Christian ministers and South Korean policemen when Yeosoo and Soonchun cities had been fallen into the hands of communist rebels several years ago.

However, my father was not persuaded by mother, and said “I am a shepherd, and how can I forsake sheep to run away for my safety?” We lived in a refugee compound, and people in our neighborhood were refugees from North Korea or China, and they did not have relatives or friends to depend on in the south. Besides, they believed that communists would not harass poor people. So they were reluctant to take a refuge.

Finally our mother and we five children left home, leaving our father and one brother Chang-Kwon. Before we could reach the iron bridge over the River Han, we saw the stream of refugees is coming back. The Korean army had prematurely exploded the bridge leading south in fear of the communist forces following them. Most refugees had no way to cross the river. At the outbreak of the day, we saw communist sympathizers were welcoming huge communist tanks which were rolling in. My mother told our eldest brother to cross the river to the south, for he would not be safe under the communist occupation, and to be drafted and sent to the front line. My younger brother, sent home to check our father’s safety, came back with the news that nothing was happened on him.

The communists felt confident they could conquer the whole peninsula so they allowed churches to open for worship in the hopes of acquiring their support. Chang Kwon was 20 and I was 18 years old, so it became more and more difficult to evade the draft of so-called “volunteer soldiers.” We decided to cross the front line to reach the south where UN forces were guarding. Besides we had not enough food at home without any savings and with no income sources. We had sold most things changeable to money – clothing, etc. We did not have jewels or valuables, but even if we had, they were less valuable during the wartime.

Food was most valuable under such circumstances. When our food had completely run out, we stayed at our uncle’s place a couple of months, to share their food, even though their rice had run out long ago. Flour was valuable, so we had to eat lean gruel with whole chaff wheat or barley. Even such lean meals did not last long, so we had to move again. When I told my father that I had no other choice but to go south, he could not stop me.

I decided to go down south with one of my classmates, but he did not show up at the promised time at the planned place. I waited for a couple of hours, and decided to go south all by myself. All the money I had was less than \$5. I had a blanket and only a lunchbox of barley that my father had given me. I carried my black school uniform in my backpack, for I foresaw to sleep outside shelter. I could not think of anyone who could provide me with accommodation. It would get fairly cool at night, even in the summer. I had no map, and no transportation, and I had never traveled south on foot. When I left Seoul, the sky was cloudy as if foretelling my unknown future. I, shaking off my gloomy feeling, prayed to God for His guidance and protection, and started to walk south. On the streets there were many families going down to south.

Before long I met one of my high school classmates who was slowly moving south with his family. He asked me to drop in at his elder sister’s in Suwon city and convey a message to meet them next day, for his family was travelling slowly with children and they had to carry several heavy baggages. I walked fast to visit his relative before sunset. When I got there she told me not to tell him that I had met her, for she could not meet her brother’s family due to her busy restaurant business. She offered me a supper and a place to sleep for the night. She gave me even a lunchbox of steamed rice. Next day I was more cheerful to walk, even though the way to go was unknown to me.

There were occasionally refugees on the road going south. I saw an old woman carrying a heavy baggage and walking same direction. When I offered help, she was happy, and we talked all the way reaching her home in the evening. She introduced me to her

family as a kind young man. They offered me supper, and I slept on straw mat on the ground in their frontyard, for their room seemed so hot. The next morning, I felt so weak to get up. There was a fall of dew at night, and I slept in the open air. Until that time I did not know that it makes you feel so tired when you sleep in the open air with dew falling. They kindly gave me a lunchbox full of steamed barley.

I have become very optimistic with two days' unexpected experiences. I believed that I would not worry about what to eat and where to sleep, for God was to take care of me. I sang all hymns I know walking in the valleys and mountain roads. My walking was from time to time interrupted by the air raids by the UN forces and somehow I had a conviction the friendly airplanes will not fire at me. In the evening I came across to a small town where I found a vacated house occupied by two communist artillery soldiers. I approached them to say that I was going south to visit the relatives of some congregation members, and asked them to allow me to sleep in the building for a night. They were friendly to me and even gave me a book of poems. I slept in my black school uniform.

I was hungry because I had had nothing to eat all day long. Passing by a farm I begged the farm owner to share a couple of sweet melons. By that evening I was starving. I learned that eating only fruit doesn't quench hunger. As I approached closer to the war frontline, the investigation at communist checkpoints became stricter. I realized I had no hope of cross the front line by walking.

I changed my plan, and decided to visit a relative of our church member. He was the leader of the community, owning a large piece of land in the neighborhood. I thought I could get some rice from him for my family. When I entered the village and asked for the location of his home, I was taken to the checkpoint and interrogated by communists. I learned that the person I was going to visit had been arrested by the communists as the counter-revolutionary Christian landowner. I should have thought of that before.

I was arrested and put into a makeshift jail. They accused me of being a South Korean spy who sent signals to guide the bombing of enemy (UN Forces) air raids. To them my black school uniform in the backpack was a good evidence. I insisted that I carried it in order to keep me warm in case I had to sleep in the open air at night. At the night when I had been detained in the jail, signals went out in the sky for air attack guidance. They had no reason to keep me any longer, and I was released with a warning to go back home directly without meeting anyone in the village. When I dropped in at the old lady's house again for an accommodation, and I received an offer – if I carried some bag of rice to Seoul for their business, they would provide me food and accommodation until I got to Seoul.

When I hurried back to Seoul, I found out that my father had been arrested by communist secret police one week prior to my return. I learned also that as the war situation had become unfavorable to communists, some forty Christian ministers in Seoul were arrested and taken away including my uncle who was a minister of Shindang-dong Presbyterian church in Seoul. My mother tried hard to find the location of my father's confinement, but her searching was in vain. We could not see him again.

I had been hiding in the underground cell to evade the communist drafts until the UN forces recaptured Seoul. Seoul had become uneasy again by joining of the Chinese communist forces in the war and pushing back the UN forces from the north. Seoul was in turmoil of chaos again, and everyone is frantic to take refuge to south. There was no transportation available to take refuge for ordinary civilians. Without any hope for an exodus from Seoul I was in despair.

4. Joined the Korean Army

I saw a recruitment notice for scribe soldiers posted by the Korean Army Headquarters and applied and was chosen due to my rich experiences of writing on stencil papers when I was a student. This meant I could evacuate to Taegu with the Korean Army headquarters. My life as an enlisted man (private second class) was so miserable. Veterans who joined the army before the war had a prejudice against educated and ordinary persons, so in order to accommodate their crooked emotions, they harassed and ill-treated newly joined enlisted men. After several months' service, I saw a recruitment announcement for an interpreter officer, but I was not qualified because of age. I applied for the position by increasing my age by one year. I was accepted and received military training and commissioned as the second lieutenant.

When I was undergoing military training, my mother came to visit me at the training center. I don't know how on earth she could find where I was, for I did not inform her of my unit. She had desperately visited unit after unit until she found me. I was astounded by the greatness of her unyielding love. During wartime it was not easy to find someone without knowing his outfit, for there are more than several hundred units. I learned about my family. My mother could have come out of Seoul with a train arranged by the American missionaries for families of kidnapped ministers. They built a widow's home and provided some sewing jobs for them to live through the Church World Service. But she didn't go. My eldest brother joined the UN forces as a KATUSA and helped an American chaplain as an organist. Another elder brother had his conscription deferred as a university student. My younger brother was admitted to the pharmaceutical college of the Seoul National University.

I was assigned to the 6th ROK Division after the basic training, worked at G-3 section of the division headquarters as an interpreter officer. While I was in the frontline I could visit my elder brother who was in the 7th US Division. After several months of the frontline service I had a week's furlough to visit my family in Pusan. My health was not good, and I was evacuated to the 15th Army Hospital in the rear area through 6th MASH. I was discharged from the Korean Army Hospital in December of 1952.

5. Returned to the Yonsei University Campus

I joined my family in Pusan. I stayed at the Widow's Home built by the American missionaries with my family. I attended the university in the daytime, and at night worked for an American transportation unit as a dispatcher interpreter. I never had enough time to sleep, and I felt my life was very hard. But I was so happy to be out of the armed services and to be able to stay with my family. My eldest brother continued his study at a theological seminary to become a minister.

As Chinese forces retreated, we came back to Seoul. I was admitted to a student dormitory for financially needy students built by Canadian Missionaries. I took odd jobs to support my studies, like cutting stencils for textbooks at the university. I also had a job as a tutor for a high school student. I was exhausted everyday. One day, the dean of my theological college recommended me to the president of the university for a Scholarship shared by a community church in the United States. The amount was \$270, which was a large sum at that time. I was so grateful that I wrote a letter thanking the church. My picture with my letter appeared in their bulletin, and I was told they had decided to sponsor me until my graduation with the annual scholarship of \$350. That amount was more than enough to cover my university education and living expenses.

6. Going to Canada for further study

After graduating the theological college, I worked for the Korea Field office of the Save the Children Federation for three years as a translator. I applied for an overseas scholarship of the United Church of Canada, and was chosen, and a full scholarship including the travel costs was offered to me. The United Church of Canada used to invite one student from Korea each year to study at a university in Canada. Concurrently, I was offered a UNESCO for a youth travel grant, to travel for half year in Europe. Unable to take both opportunities, I chose the lengthy study opportunity in Canada.

I was placed at the United Theological College in Montreal (which was affiliated with McGill University). I worked hard and struggle with my studies. I did not achieve what I hoped due to language challenges. The principal of the college was a famous New Testament scholar, Dr. George Johnston. His Scottish accent was hard to understand. Diocesan College (Anglican) was also affiliated with the Faculty of Divinity of McGill University, and we took many courses in common with Diocesan College students. NT Greek was my favorite subject, though sometimes the junior Anglican instructor could not answer my questions satisfactorily in class. The dean of the Faculty of Divinity was OT scholar, Dr. Frost.

The most compassionate professor I encountered was Prof. Wilfred Cantwell Smith who was a famous scholar in Islamic studies and an authority in the studies of world religions (comparative religions). His methodology was new to me, very challenging, and inspiring. I was homesick far away from home and my family, but enjoyed my life in Canada. I could not get a degree, and I was troubled whether I should stay longer to get a degree with more study, or return home, as I had promised to the scholarship committee. I knew one of my predecessors who had gone to the United States and stayed until he had gotten a degree. But I made up my mind to return home.

7. Working for the Seoul YMCA

Before the end of my two years' study in Canada, my friend at the national Y in Korea had proposed to me to work for the Seoul Y, which had been searching for a high caliber staff for the program in their new building. The Seoul YMCA had greatly contributed to the modernization and nation building of Korea and most of national leaders had been influenced by the Y. However, the famous Y building which had been built with help from an American businessman Mr. Wanamaker was burnt down during the Korean War, and was rebuilt with the help of the International Committee of YMCA of USA & Canada under a Building for Brotherhood project. The International Committee offered me a six months' fellowship for campus ministry and informal education program in the United State, Canada and Japan.

As the Program Director of the new Seoul YMCA I pioneered many new programs including "Sing Along with Y", "Citizen's Forum", "Christian Lawyer's Club", "Young Couple's Club", "Counseling Psychology Course for ministers", "Christmas Service with Catholics and Protestants", and organized more than a dozen of student clubs with special interests and rural service. I assisted in organizing the Canadian Immigration Council with various social, economic and religious leaders of Korea and also organized the Korean Cultural Association as the executive director. I organized several "Canada Night" and orientation courses for prospective Canadian immigrants.

I acted main role in campaigns such as "Christmas with needy neighbors", "Promoting Bright Citizen's Life" in cooperation with the Seoul City and YWCA. I was

chosen as representative to the World Assembly of Youth to be held in New Delhi together with the Secretary of the Korean UNESCO, but could not attend due to the CIA clearance. Especially Sing along Y and Citizen's Forum had become national programs of YMCAs in Korea.

9. Bossey Ecumenical Institute

Working at the Seoul Y in 1965, I received information from the National Christian Council of Korea on a scholarship available to study with the graduate school at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute associated with the World Council of Churches. I applied for the scholarship. Fortunately I was chosen among candidates, and the full scholarship awarded travel expenses, so I was allowed to visit different cities on my way to Switzerland from Seoul, and back again.

I visited YMCAs in Hong Kong, Bangkok, Athens, Rome and Jerusalem (on the Jordan side) to see some of their programs. The Jerusalem Y provided me with a sightseeing car to see historical sights and even to swim in the salty Dead Sea. In the YMCA in Rome, I met Sir Frank Wills who had been the general secretary of the British YMCA and promised me to arrange for my visit to the YMCAs in London and Paris. The theme for the year of study at the Bossey Ecumenical Institute was "Christian faith in the technological era". There were gathered some forty ministers and scholars from all over the world representing various religious and denominational backgrounds. I found delegates from Latin America were very aggressive and dominant. I met Hans Rudi Weber, the NT scholar there. His teaching method of the Bible study was impressive, and he gave me an unpublished copy of his new book "Asian Revolution." Also, the problem of leisure was my main interest so an article by Robert Lee offering a theological review of leisure caught my eye.

While I was in Switzerland, I visited the World Alliance of YMCAs and the World Student Christian Federation where my close friend was the Asian secretary. After my studies at the Graduate school of the Bossey Ecumenical Institute, I was a guest to the Bad Boll Christian Academy with an introduction by Dr. Won-Yong Kang, the Director of the Korean Christian Academy. I visited Paris YMCA, London, Glasgow, and Edinburgh Y. In North America I had three months fellowship of the International Committee to visit Toronto Y and other cities.

10. In Canada as a landed immigrant

In July 1972, I came to Toronto as a landed immigrant with my family. My son was 4 years old, and our two daughters were 3 and 1 years old, respectively. My friend helped us stay in Tokyo for one night. In the hotel at night, my youngest daughter fell off the bed because they have never slept on a bed before. I was pessimistic, feeling that the incident may be foretelling of our difficult future life as immigrants in foreign country.

The General Secretary of the National Council of YMCAs in Korea wrote to the Canadian YMCA to inquire about a job opportunity for me. What they had proposed to offer me was in Halifax, Nova Scotia, so I turned the job down because I wanted to stay in Toronto because of the better educational opportunities for my children. To make a living, I had to have a job: we had brought less than \$5000 with us, which was the maximum amount the Korean government permitted outgoing immigrant families at that time to leave with.

A temporary clerical typist in the Ontario provincial government was the only job the Canadian Manpower and Immigration office could find for me. The pay was \$2.85 for an hour. I had visited several places including a recreation director's job for the provincial

government, but I was turned down because I lacked working experiences in Canada. In addition to a full daytime job, I had another part time job at the Central Y as a program host. Next year the Toronto Korean United Church received a grant from the United Church of Canada for community work – to increase services for Korean immigrants. The Toronto Korean United Church employed me as a pastoral associate of the Very Rev. Sang Chul Lee (later he became the moderator of the United Church of Canada), and a community worker.

Mainly my responsibilities were to look after the church school and community work for newcomers. I drafted the first “New Horizon” federal grant application for the Korean seniors of the Toronto United Church and I was popular with young adults, but did not get along well with the elders. I submitted a resignation after two years’ of service. I worked for the Korean Senior Citizen’s Association as the part-time manager for several months. I was chosen to be one of the Board of Directors of the Toronto Korean Cultural Association. The new president asked me to work for them as the executive director of the Korean Canadian Cultural Association.

11. Initiating the Toronto Korean YMCA

It was my conviction that the YMCA, which was interdenominational and non-sectarian in nature, could serve people better than churches that were loyal to their denomination and governed by interests and concerns of their denominations. So I gathered several persons who were interested in supporting me in serving the Toronto Korean immigrant community, and formed a new Korean YMCA in Toronto. There already existed Korean YMCAs in LA, Chicago, New York, and Washington D.C. and most of former colleagues were working.

I was caught in a dichotomy: I didn’t know whether it would be better to start the new Toronto Korean Y under the umbrella of the Canadian YMCA or independently, outside the Canadian Y. In Tokyo the Korean Y had existed independently from the Japanese Y and remained, instead, attached to the Seoul Y. The Chicago Korean Y and Washington Korean Y were independent, whereas LA and New York Y were under the umbrella of the USA YMCA. Recognizing it would not be possible to start a Y from a scratch, without any facilities and any funding, we reached the conclusion that we should start the Korean Y under the umbrella of the Canadian YMCA. Besides I thought it was not desirable to be considered as a rival or competitor to the host country YMCA. We might have less autonomy and more restrictions in conducting our program and administration, but we could have a benefit of getting necessary supports and resources from them.

I approached the Metro YMCA and met with key persons who asked me to submit a five year plan of the Korean YMCA. I had submitted a 5 year plan, but they were still reluctant to invest financially and initiate the Korean program. The Metro Toronto YMCA had just recovered from filing bankruptcy, so they were reluctant to invest any financial fund for a new Korean program. I suggested to them that we could apply for a multiculturalism grant from the Ontario government that was specifically available for serving Korean immigrants. Although we could apply on our own, I wanted to apply as partners with the Canadian YMCA. We worked together on the application and finally learned the good news that the grant came through.

The Metro Y placed us at the Broadview YMCA to initiate the Korean Y program. The Broadview YMCA had been declining at that time, so it was fortunate for us because this meant we could have a better access to the facilities. We exchanged a letter of intent with the Board of the Broadview Y. We were given with an office space, and free access to the gym, swimming pool, and meeting rooms.

My two main objectives were to help Korean coming to Canada to experience a smoother settlement and integration processes in their immigration, and also to help families maintain an appreciation of our Korean cultural heritage for their children. To facilitate better integration, I started citizenship preparation classes, a driver's written test preparation class, English conversation classes, orientation programs, information program of government services, a counseling program for Canadian life, as well as an income tax clinic. To develop a cultural program for Korean children, I started Korean language classes, arts classes, piano, computer, taekwondo (Korean traditional self defense), swimming class, Korean dance class, etc.

The initial strategy I adopted was to choose programs which could be popular to the immigrants – ones that would either meet the needs of Korean immigrants or help them explore learning something they were interested in – knowing these would have a higher success rate. To cover expenses, I had to initiate producing programs for a fee, because while settlement programs were covered by the government grants, we had to charge fees on most of the children's cultural and arts program to cover the cost of instructors, etc.

By the end of the term, our provincial grant was renewed, and in fact, our program was so successful that it went from being a trial-basis program to a regular program of the Toronto YMCA structure. Within a year, the Broadview Y building was sold, so we were relocated to the West End YMCA. Our programs were expanded. We organized a family resident camp which attracted more than 150 persons interested in enjoying Toronto's camp facilities. I also organized social activities and recreational programs such as the Sing-Along Y gathered in the parks and indoors, an annual Yoot Tournament (a Korean traditional game played during the New Year, Christmas parties, bus tours to view the changing autumn foliage and to visit national parks, family ski trips, guitar classes, etc. I also organized a young couple's club modeled after some of the popular social activities in Korea that brought together traditionally separated men and women; I organized two Y's Men's Clubs with Korean community leaders that became members of a service club supporting the YMCA mission.

12. Working with the Toronto Board of Education

Our program was conspicuously and greatly expanded with the help of the Toronto Board of Education. Because of the multiculturalism policy promoted by Premier Pierre Trudeau, the provincial government adopted the heritage language program providing enormous amount of grants to local boards of education for heritage language program. With the West End YMCA I actively participated in lobbying for implementation of the heritage language program for the Toronto Board of Education and succeeded to include Korean language in the first five language groups. I requested Bickford Park High School for our site for the Korean language instruction, for it is most conveniently situated in the heart of the Korean community, and very close to the subway station. And I told the Board Saturday morning would be the best time for Korean program and the Board opened the school for us on Saturdays. Not only classrooms, but also necessary school supplies and teaching materials were provided to us on the same basis as the regular curriculum. Staff employment (Korean language instructors and lead instructor) was decided on our recommendation. The instructor's pay was high on the Canadian teacher's level – approximately \$29 per hour. With our promotion and publicities, many children were brought by their parents. We started with three levels of classes, and later the number of classes increased.

We asked the Board to provide English classes for parents while they were waiting for children in class, and also emphasized that the bilingual method (to teach English using Korean language) would be more effective with Koreans immigrants. Our ESL Instructors were hired by the Board also in consultation with us. The Toronto Board of Education was more open and aggressive than any other boards of education, and many community agencies cooperated in implementing this program. To meet the needs of the Korean newcomers we expanded the ESL program from Saturday to weekday programs, evening classes, including three levels of classes: basic, intermediate, advanced. With the help of the Toronto Board of Education, we opened a couple of citizenship preparation classes and computer training classes also. Our instruction sites were also expanded from Bickford Park High School to the Palmerston Public Library, Korean Y centre and the Lansing United Church building. At the time some 20 classes were sponsored by the Toronto Board of Education. We contacted the North York Board of Education for heritage language program and ESL for newcomers from Korea.

When the Immigration Department of the federal government initiated the LINC program (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada), we participated and opened three classes in North York where Korean newcomers had been increasingly settled. The necessary expenses, including rental space, instructor and coordinator's salary, text books and learning supplies were fully covered. Once the citizenship test was given at our program centre by the citizenship court staff, and then the citizenship judge presided over the citizenship award ceremony for Korean applicants solely at the metro YMCA auditorium. It must be the highlight of our citizenship program. No other agencies in the Korean community were given such privileges. On Oct. 29, 1996, the minister of the Citizenship and Immigration of the Federal Government gave me a Certificate of Recognition for promoting Canadian Citizenship. The Korean Y program was the only partner of the Immigration and Citizenship department for the settlement services for the Korean community (ISAP--Immigration Settlement and Adaptation Program) for many years until recent days.

The Ontario provincial government which had enabled the initiation of the Korean Y program with the multiculturalism grant had continually and steadily supported our program. The NLOC (Newcomers for language and orientation coordination) program grant from them supplemented our program covering coordinator's salary and promotion expenses. We organized "Community-based ESL Coordinator's Committee" to do some lobbying and pipeline role for ESL delivery. The Korean edition of the Newcomer's Guide put out by the provincial government was translated by me. The West End Y was involved in the initial stage of organizing the OCASI (Ontario Community Agencies Supporting Immigrants) which had developed to a strong pressure group to governments.

Our cultural programs for children were greatly expanded taking advantage of the heritage language program of the Toronto Board of Education. We successfully linked the heritage language program to other cultural program which we charge a fee to cover expenses. The Korean summer school was linked to the Day Camp program of the Toronto Y using their bus services. In Korean summer program we added fine arts, computer, Korean dance, taekwondo to the language instruction. Korean language classes reached four classes, and the enrollment for summer school children exceeded one hundred. Later the Y also expanded their day camp to include special interest activities such as arts camp, computer camp, sports camp, gymnastic camp, etc.

The Toronto YMCA used to be rather passive in serving immigrants except a nominal Portuguese program. Encouraged by the success of the Korean community service

program, they approached the federal government for LINC and newcomer service program and received a tremendous amount of grant.

In 1998, I retired from working with the YMCA when I was a little over 66 years. At my retirement ceremony in 1998, the Director General of the Ontario Region, the Department of Citizenship and Immigration offered me a letter of appreciation for contribution to the settlement and integration of newcomers. In May 29, 1999 the Canada YMCA offered me a gold watch engraved with Y logo and plaque of recognition of my lifetime support and encouragement of YMCA.

13. My families and relatives

We never heard from our father Dong-Cheol after he was arrested and taken away to the north. But many years ago, we read an article in a leading Korean national paper, the Dong-A Daily, that reported the situations of kidnapped ministers from Seoul. We learned that our father had died from malnutrition and disease while in North Korea. It reported that our father, along with other kidnapped ministers, had never yielded to the threats of the communists, and had never appeased their demand to recant their faith.

Our mother Maria Ahn traveled between Seoul and North America to look after her grandchildren and passed away in Seoul at the age of 90. She did not have a formal education, but was determined to give higher education to all of her six sons even after her husband had been kidnapped by communists. She even made meals to sell at a marketplace to poor laborers. When she carried heavy meals on her head to the market place, several war orphans playing on the streets pushed her. She dropped the heavy container and broke her frontal teeth in the fall. She fainted from the pain, and an American GI gave her a bar of chocolate which she brought back home to give to her young children. When my brother, Paul (Chang Kwon) who had gone to the United States for his study, heard about this, he shared the story with the lady's group at a church that had invited him to speak. They collected some money and sent it to her to have her teeth fixed. She did not use the money for her teeth, but used it to support her children. Later on, when my brother Paul found out about this, he sent her money again, but this time asked her to send him her picture showing her false teeth. Her love for her children was so great and sacrificial. The presbytery of the Presbyterian Church gave her a citation as the mother of the year.

My study in Canada delayed my marriage until I was 34 years of my age. As a son of a rigorous pastor I was timid in associating with a different sex. My friend's wife finally introduced me to a charming schoolteacher, Jeong-Ji (Jane), who became my wife and has shared my life ever since. Financially, she supported me and our family by teaching at a high school, running a grocery store, managing a clothing store for a key location in downtown, working for World Vision Canada as a coordinator for the Korean program and fundraiser, and serving as an interpreter for Koreans who needed government services. Many Korean immigrants say the purpose of their immigration was to give a good education to their children. She successfully raised three intelligent children and sent them to Massachusetts for their university studies.

My son John Yah-Sung (Yah-Sung in Chinese characters means a voice in the which is St. John and my father's pen name), graduated from a public high school as a top student receiving the highest honors of a gold medal from the East York Board of Education, and a plaque engraved with his name is displayed at the entrance of the auditorium of the school. He was accepted by all the Ivy-league schools, MIT, and Stanford University. MIT and

Stanford sent even telegrams. His final choice was Harvard. He graduated with a Magna Cum Laude in English. While he was at Stanford studying medicine he also he pursued his MA in English. He did resident training at Baylor, and one year in hand surgery at UCLA, and has been working at the Northwestern University Memorial Hospital. Since he has been teaching there, he has received the best teaching award from the medical school a couple of times.

My first daughter Mari has a very warm heart, and is very empathetic and sympathetic to needs of other persons. She was talented in fine arts and music. She plays cello and guitar. She sings well and charmed the audience when she sang a Korean folk song at the Y auditorium when we had a big function with a taekwondo group from North Korea. She showed an outstanding leadership at her high school, and was a team leader. At the graduating ceremony of the Junior High School, she was chosen as the valedictorian by the teachers. She was chosen as an exchange student of the Rotary Club at grade 12. After graduating from Brandeis University, she wanted to proceed to a conservative seminary, but finally listened to my advice and chose Princeton Theological Seminary. And she went to Emory University and received the Master's degree with Summa Cum Laude from the Candler School of Theology. We are very proud of her. She has been working hard on her Ph D. program, while properly looking after her two wild young sons.

My youngest daughter Gobi was given the nickname, "social butterfly," because she was very popular. She liked to travel, and went to Russia and spent one summer in Germany as an exchange student. She graduated from Wellesley College in Massachusetts with a double major in English and Philosophy. She was the editor of a magazine, and she developed her own consulting firm. She is living in Panama with her son, Pado, and her husband Piers is an expert in surfing who is also building their house.

As a retired person now, my wife I are enjoying some leisure time activities. We have started to play golf. Our children are scattered in the North America – Chicago, Seattle, and Panama – so naturally we travel very frequently to see them and our five grand children. I enjoy reading novels in Japanese and Chinese languages. I enjoy playing "go" and table games over the computer.

My brothers are living in different cities.

My eldest brother, Chang Kook is a retired pastor and is living in Seoul, Korea. He has four children. The eldest son Kyu-Suk is a reporter of a local paper; the second son Kyu-Man, is a businessman; his eldest daughter Hye-Sun is married to a Presbyterian pastor; his youngest daughter Hye-Sook is running a small laundry depot with her husband in Toronto.

Chang Duck is a retired pharmacist residing in the Laguna area in California. His eldest daughter, Helen is a lawyer and living at Oakland, California. His second daughter Nancy is a good tennis player, and spends half her time in the States for half the year, and the other half in Korea, where her husband manages a business. They have three children: Meagan, eldest daughter loves horse-riding and owns a horse, and Jimmy and Katie. Susan is Chang Duck's youngest daughter, she is lawyer and a public school vice principal, and her husband Brad is a senior pastor of English ministry in Chicago. Chang-Duck's only son, Andy is a drama writer and an actor living in England with his English wife, who is also an actress.

Another younger brother, Chang-Kil is a pastor of a Korean Presbyterian Church in New Jersey, and was the moderator of the Korean Presbyterian Churches in the USA. He was the 2009 Award recipient of the Council of Churches of the City of New York together with Congressman C.B.Rangel, Dr. John Starks, Bishop R.R.Paesar, Rev. A.M. Raygerss, Rev.

A.M.Rogers, & Elder H.Kang. His wife Esther is an ordained minister working part time for an American church. She earned her Th.M. at Princeton Theological Seminary, and her Th.D. from Drew University. They have three sons. Paul is a Yale graduate and is a resident in pediatrics. Peter graduated from Johns Hopkins, attends U Penn to be a dentist. He is an excellent baseball player. Philip was the president of student body in high school is also a Yale graduate who is now working for an investment company.

My youngest brother Chang-Lim graduated the Catholic University Medical School and is a family doctor practicing in Ft. Lauderdale with his wife Yongmae who was trained as a nurse. Their eldest daughter, Helen graduated from Brown University. His second daughter, Marianne went to Gaudette University because she is deaf. She is married now and has job in Washington D.C. His son, Paul, is a U Penn graduate and works as a lawyer in corporate law.

One sad story of our family is that my brother Paul Chang-Kwon, who was the ace of our family, drowned on his 29th birthday in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. He was closest to me among my five brothers. He had influenced me so much. We read in Japanese language the biographies of great men, novels and world literatures together, and attended revival meetings of famous preachers together. In 1955, he went to study in the United States earlier than any other members of our family, when he was a junior at the medical school of Seoul National University. Having graduated from Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa, he was working at the Radiation Research Laboratory of the State University of Iowa, while he was taking graduate school courses at the medical school. He had written in his last letter to me that he had, in the first term, only 4 A's and 1 B, and he would get straight A's in the second term. He wanted to work in Africa as Albert Schweitzer, but passed away without accomplishing his dream.

Some ten years ago, we decided that all our brothers and their families would meet every three years. The first reunion was hosted by Chang-Duck and his family in Chicago; and the second family reunion met in New Jersey and was host by Chang-Kil and his family. The third reunion met in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida during Christmas season 2006. The next family reunion meets in Toronto in the summer of 2010, under my family's hosting. We hope no member of our family or relative will pass away before that time. The theme of the last reunion was "reflections". The theme of our next reunion is not decided yet. We do not know how long the tradition of this family reunion will continue. We hope the leadership of the family reunions will be carried on by the second generation and continue.

On the occasion of his retirement, my younger brother, Chang-Duck, made a large donation to Seosomoon Church to establish a scholarship fund carrying our father's pen name, "Yah-Sung" (meaning "a voice in the wilderness"). Seosomoon Church was founded and established by our father after the end of the World War II, and he served there until he was arrested by the communists. My mother is buried in the suburbs of Seoul. My brother was buried at a cemetery in Iowa, but a few years ago my younger brother Chang-Duck moved his bones and stone marker to the Seosomoon Church cemetery where some sites were reserved for our family. My brothers and I continue to believe that we, as a family, should put our resources together to do worthwhile thing for the church in our parents' memory.

Appendix B

“Lesson 18: HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION OF TESHUQA.”

Excerpted from *God's Word to Women* by Katherine C. Bushnell (Minneapolis: Christians for Biblical Equality) Reprinted 2003.

HISTORY OF THE TRANSLATION OF TESHUQA.

138. Were the teaching true that all women must suffer pain and servitude for the sin of Eve, then it were pertinent to ask, Why must they suffer thus,—because they are Eve's offspring? Are not men equally the offspring of Eve? The only answer is, "Because they are female offspring." But who made them female offspring,—women or God? GOD. Then are we taught that God is punishing women, not for their own fault, not because they are sinners, not even because Eve sinned; God is punishing women for what He Himself made them—because they are women, not men. Away with such an attack upon God's reputation for justice! And further, the idea that "sorrow," in this verse means labor pains, or periodical suffering in women, is far-fetched; the same word is used of Adam in the very next verse. This word is not used for such suffering anywhere in all the Scriptures.

139. Since this passage in Genesis, "Thy desire shall be to thy husband," has been the cause of much immorality among men, in the cruelty and oppression they have inflicted upon their wives; since this false translation has been the cause of much degradation, unhappiness and suffering to women; and since this translation has been made the very keystone of an arch of doctrine subordinating woman to man, without which keystone the arch itself falls to pieces; and since the Apostle Paul's utterances on the "woman question" are always interpreted as though this perversion of the sense of Genesis 3:16 was his accepted foundation upon which he builds his super-structure, it behooves us to review again the history of the ancient translation of the word teshuqa, and this we will do with the aid of the appended table:

RENDERING OF TESHUQA IN ANCIENT VERSIONS

Name of the Ancient Version Approximate date

Translation of Tesuqua (Genesis 3:16, Genesis 4:7, Cant. 7:10)

1. SEPTUAGINT GREEK 285 B.C.

Genesis 3:16, turning; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, turning

2. SYRIAC PESHITTO 100 AD to 50 AD

Genesis 3:16, wilt turn; Genesis 4:7, wilt turn; Cant. 7:10, wilt turn

3. Samaritan, of the Pentateuch only 100 AD to 50 AD

Genesis 3:16, turning; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, turning

4. The Old Latin 200 A. D.

Genesis 3:16, turning; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, turning

5. Sahidic 300 A. D.

Genesis 3:16, alliance; Genesis 4:7, unknown; Cant. 7:10, unknown

6. Boharic 350 A.D.

Genesis 3:16, turning; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, unknown

7. Aethiopic 500 A.D.

Genesis 3:16, turning; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, turning

8. Arabic Uncertain

Genesis 3:16, direction; Genesis 4:7, moderation; Cant. 7:10, turning

VERSIONS MADE UNDER RABBINICAL INFLUENCE:

9. Aquila's Greek 140 A.D.

Genesis 3:16, alliance; Genesis 4:7, unknown; Cant. 7:10, unknown

10. Symmachus' Greek 160 A.D.

Genesis 3:16, alliance; Genesis 4:7, Impulse[1]; Cant. 7:10, unknown

11. Theodotion's Greek 185 A.D.

Genesis 3:16, unknown; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, unknown

12. LATIN VULGATE 382 A.D.

Genesis 3:16, power; Genesis 4:7, appetite; Cant. 7:10, turning

PURELY RABBINICAL TEACHING:

BABYLON TARGUM

Pentateuch only Babylon Talmud 800 A.D.[2]

Genesis 3:16, lust; Genesis 4:7, turning; Cant. 7:10, lacking.

From this Table we readily see that of the twelve ancient versions, 10 furnish us with the rendering "turning," in at least one passage. Of the 28 known rendering of teshuqa, in the above Table, the word is rendered "turning" 21 times. In the 7 remaining renderings, only 2 seem to agree; all the others disagree.

140. With such testimony as this before us (and we have quoted every ancient version we have been able to find, and none of importance, as likely to shed the least light on the meaning of this word are omitted from the list), we can see no justification for rendering this word "desire." Even the Babylonian Targum renders it "turning" in the second passage (Genesis 4:7), and thus lends its authority to this sense. Nothing but that

rabbinic perversion and addition to the Scriptures, teaching that God pronounced ten curses on Eve (something that Scripture nowhere teaches) seems to be at the bottom of this extraordinary reading. A hint of such a meaning for *teshuqa* as "lust" seems to have crept into the Bible through Jerome's Latin Vulgate. But even he did not give the sense "appetite" for the word as relates to Eve, but as to Abel; and further, even Jerome adds his authority, in his translation of the third passage, to the sense "turning," and for 3:16, in his writings,—see Additional Note.

141. But let us now trace the adoption of "desire" into the English versions. In 1380 appeared the first English version by Wycliffe. It was not made from the Hebrew original, but from the Latin Vulgate, and it follows its readings in all three places. The Douay Bible, of 1609, of the Roman Catholic Church, is also a reproduction of the Latin Vulgate. Putting these two on one side as mere translations of the Vulgate, we turn to the others.

142. After Wycliffe's version, and before any other English Bible appeared, an Italian Dominican monk, named Pagnino, translated the Hebrew Bible. The *Biographie Universelle*, quotes the following criticism of his work, in the language of Richard Simon: "Pagnino has too much neglected the ancient versions of Scripture to attach himself to the teachings of the rabbis." What would we naturally expect, therefore? That he would render this word "lust,"—and that is precisely what he does in the first and the third place; in the second, he translates, "appetite."

143. Pagnino's version was published at Lyons in 1528. Seven years later, in 1535, Coverdale's English Bible appeared, published at Zurich, probably. Tyndale's version, in sections, had appeared in the time between Pagnino's and Coverdale's, published at Cologne and at Worms. It is to be noted that these were days of persecution, when no English Bible could have been published in England, and this may in part account for these versions being

influenced by Pagnino. At any rate, from the time Pagnino's version appeared, every English version, excepting the two Vulgate translations we put on one side, has followed Pagnino's rendering for the first passage, up to the present day. As to the second passage, Cranmer's Bible (1539) first introduced "lust" into this place, which was later followed by the Geneva Bible, and the Authorized and Revised versions. But Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthew (John Rogers) and Cranmer all retained "turning" in the third passage. But the three latest Protestant Bibles, Geneva, Authorized and Revised, have obliterated all trace of any other sense but "desire." The reading of the older English Bibles which follow Pagnino is, "Thy lust (or lusts) shall pertain to thy husband."

144. Now will you please turn to the Title Page of your Bible. If you have an Authorized Version, you will read the assurance given to the reader, that the Book has been "Translated out of the original tongues; and with the former translations diligently compared and revised." If you have a Revised Version of 1884, it will claim to be "the version set forth A. D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised." These assurances do not hold good, in this case where the status and welfare of one-half the human race is directly and vitally concerned; and the highest good of the other half just as vitally concerned, if even more remotely and less visibly. Pagnino's word has been retained against the overwhelming authority of the ancient versions.

[edit]

Additional Note.

It is to be noted that the Church Fathers seem to be ignorant of any other sense but "turning" for this word. We have noted that the following employ "turning," in one, two, or all three passages: Philo (a Jew—not a Ch. Father died 60 A. D.), Clement of Rome (d. 100), Irenaeus (d. 202), Tertullian (born 160), Origen (b. 186), Epiphanius (b. 310 in Palestine),

Jerome (b. 335,—in both Genesis verses, in spite of his own different renderings), Ambrose (b. 340), Augustine (b. 354), and Theodoret (b. 386).

In spite of the plain sense of the Greek words apostrophe and evistrophe, and 'the Latin rendering of teshuqa, conversio (all conveying, in their root, the sense of "turning"), the well known translation of the Church Fathers, published by T. and T. Clark of Edinburgh, renders the word "desire," in these passages. But these words cannot be lawfully rendered thus.[edit]

Footnotes

[1] or alliance.

[2] We give this date for the publication of the Talmud on the high authority of Prof. D. S. Margoliouth, M.A. of Oxford, in his valuable work, *Lines of Defense of the Biblical Revelation*. The date has often been fixed as early as 300 A.D.

Appendix C
Corrupt Desire:
Umberto Cassuto's Augustinian Legacy of
Human Failure and Divine Punishment in Genesis 3

In this section we are told how the first man was formed from the dust of the ground, how he dwelt in the garden of Eden, of the creation of woman, of the sin that they both committed, and of the punishment meted out to them.

So opens Umberto Cassuto's introduction to "The Story of the Garden of Eden." As he describes it, the narrative found between Genesis 2.4 - 3.24¹¹² seeks to offer an account of theodicy, "The primary purpose of the Torah in these chapters is to explain how it is that in the Lord's world, the world of the good and beneficent God, evil should exist and man should endure pain and troubles and calamities."¹¹³ Employing a familiar tripartite formula traditionally used to lay out the problem of theodicy, Cassuto frames the theological issue: since the goodness of a loving God creates a good and loving world, how does evil come to be present in it to cause harm and suffering? Cassuto further asserts that the literary style of the passage, poetic narrative, is designed to convey the theo-etiological purpose of the verses with greater effectiveness, "Scripture had to inculcate its doctrines through the medium of concrete description, that is by telling a story from which the reader could draw a moral."¹¹⁴

Yet while it would seem that an introduction of creation as "the world of the good and beneficent God" suggests that all creation including, and in particular, humankind, is

¹¹² Cassuto recognizes that his decision to frame the Edenic pericope as inclusive of the verses between Genesis 2.4-3.24 challenges the presumptions of "the majority of scholars" have accepted to be sourced by two distinctive schools, findings of Genesis 2 to an exegesis of Genesis 3, "The question of the relationship between this and the preceding section presents a formidable problem and merits special attention." However, advanced on suggestions that there are connections between the two sections,

¹¹³ Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 1: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1998), 71.

¹¹⁴ Cassuto, 73.

affirmed as mediating the goodness of its Creator, Cassuto offers no such affirmation of humanity while clarifying that humanity suffers “pains and troubles and calamities,” as a result of evil.¹¹⁵ This omission takes on greater significance in Cassuto’s next comments:

The answer given here to the burning question of the origin of evil in the world is this: although the world that issued from the hand of the Creator is, according to the testimony of the previous section [Genesis 1.1 – 2.3] good – yea, very good – *yet man corrupts it by his conduct and brings evil into the world as a result of his corruption.*¹¹⁶ [Italics mine, M.K.]

As Cassuto frames the problematic, we hear echoes of the familiar Augustine formulation that seeds evil in the intersection of humanity and corruption: humanity + corruption = evil. Thus concerned with the origin and nature of evil, Cassuto assures us that Genesis 3 offers an interpretation that reveals how the goodness (“yea, very good,”) of God’s creation is violated by evil, and humanity’s part in that reality.

In what follows, then, we are implicitly invited to anticipate learning *why* humanity is vulnerable to corruption, *when* the corruption takes hold to become the portal through which evil enters God’s creation, *how* evil is manifest, and *whether* humanity’s sin in Genesis 3 is understood to be a single event or manifests as an enduring legacy. Of particular theological interest for us remains *whether* and *how* the contours of Cassuto’s interpretation of the Edenic narrative traces Augustine’s understanding of theodicy through an ontology of creation. Recalling how Augustine adamantly refuses to allow evil to be conceptualized as manifesting

¹¹⁵ Cassuto employs the term *man* indiscriminately throughout his work to refer both to humanity as a whole and the male gender. To avoid future confusion, however, I will hereafter limit the use of the term *man* to only those instances when it is clear that Cassuto intends to speak of male humanity, and use *humanity* whenever Cassuto appears to refer to the human race.

¹¹⁶ Cassuto, 71.

the “good” of existence (“All that *is*, is good”) how does Cassuto describe the nature of the corruption that manifests evil? Does he also maintain that evil’s presence is only subsidiary - - as a corruption of that which is good, or does evil manage to have an independent existence, introducing an alteration of the ontological structure fundamental to any theodicy in the lineage of Augustine? According to Cassuto, what constitutes sin in Genesis 3? Does evil require humanity’s consent, and if so, why does humanity give it? Is sin confirmed through humanity’s freedom to will? Or is sin manifest in humanity’s desire?

Beyond Cassuto’s explanation of the nature of evil, it remains to be seen how he works with Genesis 3 to defend the integrity of God’s enduring goodness and power despite creation’s violation. As a theological defense that must account for the nature and role of God in the face of human pain and suffering, how does Cassuto characterize God’s love such that it maintains an unaltered efficacy in the struggle, pain, and suffering of humanity described in 3.14-24? How does Cassuto explain the nature of God’s goodness in the face of humanity’s corruption and subsequent evil in creation? Or is evil so regrettably intolerable to God that God’s benevolent sensibilities must “alter when it alteration finds?”¹¹⁷ For now, Cassuto’s initial silence on such matters invites our patience. As he begins interpreting the passage, our part is to attend to Cassuto as he takes pains to clarify, whether explicitly or implicitly, how the transformation from good to corruption occurs in humanity, and thereby all creation, and why.

¹¹⁷ “Let me not to the marriage of true minds Admit impediments. Love is not love Which alters when it alteration finds, Or bends with the remover to remove: O no! it is an ever-fixed mark That looks on tempests and is never shaken; It is the star to every wandering bark, Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken. Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks Within his bending sickle's compass come: Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, But bears it out even to the edge of doom. If this be error and upon me proved, I never writ, nor no man ever loved.” Sonnet 116, William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616)

Moving into the first portion of Genesis 3 comprising verses 1-7,¹¹⁸ Cassuto specifies that the theme shifts from an overall philosophical explanation of the origin of evil to take on the tone of an apology, intended, from compassion, to reassure a humanity perplexed by the promise of “the Creator’s paternal love,” contested by the reality of “the multitudinous troubles...”

The central theme of our section aims to give a philosophical explanation of the origin of evil of the world, but has the practical purpose of proving moral instruction and of assuaging the feeling of perplexity in the heart of man, who finds a contraction between the Creator’s paternal love and the multitudinous troubles that throngs the world.¹¹⁹

To locate his approach to expositing the text in the wider context of exegetical efforts, Cassuto first distinguishes his work as not concerned with “abstract speculation,” which he ascribes to an exegetical lineage he associates with a more “Hellene” approach, or Greek philosophical desire to “know the causes of things...unrelated to any practical purpose.” He dismisses the nature of such “aetiological” readings of the text concerned with establishing the causes of things (i.e. human speech, wearing of clothes, why the serpent crawls on its belly, its inclination to bite, etc.) and warns the reader not to confuse such concerns with those shaping his account.¹²⁰ Cassuto makes the distinction that his own

¹¹⁸ Cassuto, 138-149. Genesis 3.1-7 is identified by Cassuto as the fifth paragraph, in “Section Two: The Story Of The Garden Of Eden,” covered in the first volume “Part I From Adam to Noah Genesis I-VI 8.” His two part commentary on Genesis 1-11 was intended to be part of a larger series on the Pentateuch. But as translator Israel Abrahams so poignantly laments, “It must be an everlasting source of regret to all lovers of the Bible that Professor Umberto Cassuto died before he was able to complete his *magnum opus*, the Commentary on the Pentateuch. In the words of Bialik: ‘The song of his life was cut off in the middle...And lo! the hymn is lost for ever!’” Cassuto, vii.

¹¹⁹ Cassuto, 139.

¹²⁰ Commenting on the past efforts concerned to exegete Genesis 3 as an effort to account for causes of phenomena, Cassuto offers, “This expositional approach does not take into account the difference between the Semitic way of thinking and the Greek. The

interpretation will be found more “Semitic” in its concern of distilling those moral teachings (and practical guidance provided therein) drawn to illumining how God’s love is to be understood in the experience of human suffering.¹²¹

The Serpent as “Woman’s Cunning”

Genesis 3.1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'"

Approaching the exegetical challenge presented by the serpent, Cassuto acknowledges that commentators "have found extreme difficulty in determining the nature of the serpent in our section."¹²² As he considers past interpretive solutions, Cassuto deftly rejects the arguments of pseudepigraphical writings, the New Testament, and later rabbinic literature which conclude "the serpent is none other than Satan," and likewise commentators who suggest the snake is "a kind of symbol of the evil impulse in the human heart," fundamentally because these "introduce into the text concepts that are foreign to it."¹²³ He remarks with favor on an interpretation offered by ancient Talmudic sources describing “the

Hellene has a natural bent for abstract speculation, and consequently he was eager to know the causes of things; this knowledge, unrelated to any practical purpose – knowledge for its own sake – he deemed of great importance. To the Semite, on the other hand, the desire for knowledge that has no practical value was mere dilettantism.” Cassuto, 139.

¹²¹ Cassuto, 139.

¹²² Exceeding in detail and scope the efforts of other exegetes who stage their disagreement with a small circle of varied or prominent commentators in rendering their conclusion on the matter, I found Cassuto’s commentary on the serpent richer than others available to me in English. On this matter, Claus Wellhausen's survey-like approach read more as assessment of the correctness of the second-level findings or conclusions of others, whereas Cassuto engaged and presents the findings of his own primary research in shaping his conclusions. His analysis of the serpent in Genesis 3.1 covers pp139-143.

¹²³ Cassuto, 139.

primeval serpent" as merely belonging to, "a species of animal, although differing in character from the serpent today, and resembling man in his upright stature and his manner of eating,"¹²⁴ recognizing, however, that such an insight better serves the subsequent discussion on Genesis 3.14 to come.¹²⁵ For the serpent in Genesis 3.1, the Talmudic interest in species allows Cassuto merely to establish the serpent as etymologically familiar:

At any rate, it is beyond doubt that the Bible refers to an ordinary, natural creature, for it is distinctly stated here: "Beyond any beast of the field that the Lord God had made."¹²⁶

Still, two questions about the serpent remain unanswered for Cassuto. Beholden to the fact that the passage names a snake in particular – and not another animal¹²⁷ – Cassuto finds himself obligated to search further for a more satisfying understanding of the serpent's identity; his criteria for a suitable serpent must answer why, 1) "if the serpent were only an ordinary animal, why does Scripture tell us he *spoke*"; and 2) "how could a mere animal know all that the serpent here knows, including even the hidden purpose of the Lord God?"¹²⁸ Attending to "the documents and pictures of the peoples of the Ancient East," Cassuto finds these prove equally unfruitful. He locates:

...all types of sacred serpents, serpent-gods or serpents that symbolize deities, serpents that are symbols of life and fertility, serpents that guard the sanctuaries or the boundaries,

¹²⁴ Cassuto, 140.

¹²⁵ In Genesis 3.14 Cassuto anticipates the Talmudic interpretation helping to address whether "according to the plain sense of Scripture, the primordial serpent was in truth different from the kind we now." Cassuto, 140.

¹²⁶ Cassuto, 140.

¹²⁷ "...if we are concerned here with an ordinary creature, why just a serpent and not another animal? And if we answer that the cunning of the serpent was the determining factor, then why just this, and not another wily creature, like the fox?" Cassuto, 140.

¹²⁸ Cassuto, 140.

serpents used for "divining" future events, and so forth...¹²⁹

and concludes, "...but so far no serpents have been found corresponding in character to the one in this section."¹³⁰ Despite emphasizing the variety of serpents, even sacred serpents, serpent-gods, and serpents symbolizing deities and divining the future, Cassuto determines that none of the aforementioned types sufficiently answer his explicit criteria for a serpent who 1) can speak and 2) has knowledge of what God knows.

Having eliminated the any Ancient Near East references as a suitable match for identifying the serpent in Genesis 3, Cassuto moves "to consider the ideas that were associated with the concept of the serpent among the Israelites themselves," and immediately highlights that "there existed among them an ancient poetic tradition that told of the revolt of the prince of the sea against God..."¹³¹ This brief description makes evident that some additional, previously unnamed criterion remains yet to be identified by Cassuto. Cassuto suggests the serpent belonging to the ancient poetic traditions (rejected by the Torah) is the closest in identity to the serpent in Eden and describes only a prince of the sea in revolt against God. No mention is made of this serpent's ability to speak or have knowledge of the divine: we are left to assume that whatever the affinity is between the serpent in the rejected poetic traditions and the serpent in Eden, it is found either in the concept of the serpent as belonging to royalty of the sea, or the serpent as agent of revolt against God.

Cassuto's third but unspoken criteria for the establishing the identity of the serpent in Eden can discerned as he discusses the reconstituting of the identity of the serpents in ancient poetic traditions.

¹²⁹ Cassuto, 140.

¹³⁰ Cassuto, 140.

¹³¹ Cassuto, 141.

According to Cassuto, as ancient Israelites re-appropriated persisting legends about the seas and sea monsters in revolt, “one innovation consisted in the fact that the sea and rivers and helpers, who rebelled against the Creator, became...symbols of the forces of wickedness...”¹³² In the two phrases Cassuto offers: “there existed among them an ancient poetic tradition that told of the revolt of the prince of the sea against God...” and “one innovation consisted in the fact that the sea and rivers and helpers, who rebelled against the Creator, became...symbols of the forces of wickedness,” it would appear that character of rebellion emerges as the only common denominator in both descriptions.¹³³ The suggestion that the rebellious nature of the serpent causes Cassuto to identify it as the most aptly descriptive of the Edenic serpent is problematic. The serpent in the poetic traditions is rejected by the ancient Israelites because it is said to be rebellious:

the Torah...rejects the entire poetic tradition relating to the revolt of the sea and the rivers and the monsters; the sea, it holds, is only a created entity, which was made according to the will of the Creator and forthwith received the form that He wished to give...the dragons are but natural creatures, which were created by the word of God to do his will...¹³⁴

And even in an earlier discussion of the Genesis 1.21 reference to “the great sea monster,” Cassuto notes the Torah’s objection to legends that describe the sea monsters has to do with the suggestion that creatures can rebel against the gods,

...as I have stated previously, the Torah is entirely opposed to these myths. It voices its protest in its own quiet manner, relating *So God created the great sea monsters*. It is as though the Torah said...”far be it from any one to suppose that the sea monsters were mythological beings opposed to God or in revolt against him; they were as natural as the rest of the

¹³² Cassuto, 141.

¹³³ Cassuto, 141.

¹³⁴ Cassuto, 142.

creatures, and were formed in their proper time and in their proper place by the word of the Creator, in order that they might fulfil [sic] His will like the other created beings.”¹³⁵

So why, if Cassuto makes it a point time and again to evidence that he is aware of the Torah’s protest against, “...ancient Israelite conception of the serpent,” does he seem to suggest the very feature of rebellion offer the closest match for describing the serpent in Eden? Moreover, given Cassuto’s initial criteria for the serpent: 1) "if the serpent were only an ordinary animal, why woes Scripture tell us he *spoke*?"; and 2) "how could a mere animal know all that the serpent here knows, including even the hidden purpose of the Lord God?"¹³⁶ does the rebellious serpent of the ancient poetic traditions meet the other criteria for the Genesis 3 serpent? Does Cassuto ever suggest the rebellious serpent of the poetic traditions can speak or knows the hidden purpose of God? If not, wherein lies the usefulness of the rebellious serpent known to ancient Israelites through more ancient poetic traditions?

Returning to the explanation of the ancient Israelites re-appropriating persisting legends about the seas and sea monsters in revolt, “one innovation consisted in the fact that the sea and rivers and helpers, who rebelled against the Creator, became...symbols of the forces of wickedness...”¹³⁷ and looking for the commonality with, “there existed among them an ancient poetic tradition that told of the revolt of the prince of the sea against

¹³⁵ Cassuto, 49-51. His discussing of Genesis 1.21 is where Cassuto first raises the issue of the serpents in the ancient Israelite literature, and the Torah’s rejection of the suggestion “In Egypt, in Mesopotamia, in the land of Canaan and in the countries of the east...all sorts of legends...about the battles of the great gods against the sea dragon and similar monsters...in Israelite circles, the traditions concerning sea monsters...assumed an aspect in keeping with the spirit of Israel. No longer do divine forces oppose the supreme godhead, but, following the same principle as the case of the lord of the sea, Scripture depicts them as creatures in revolt against their Maker.” Cassuto revisits this discussion in his examination of Genesis 3. Cassuto, pp.141-142.

¹³⁶ Cassuto, 140.

¹³⁷ Cassuto, 141.

God...” it is possible that Cassuto intended to highlight in both descriptions of the serpent, the association between their rebellious nature, and the emergence of serpents as, “symbols of the forces of wickedness.”¹³⁸

This understanding of the serpent being identified with wickedness because of its rebellion resonates, according to Cassuto, with the theme of Genesis 3 as concerning the origin of evil:

...it is only to be expected that the theme should be linked with one of the usual and well-known symbols of connected therewith, and particularly with the ordinary serpent, an animal that is found in the sea and rivers on land... [Cassuto makes additionally clear] and could not have appeared in the garden. However...the Torah...holds it only a created entity, which was made according to the will of the creator and forthwith received the form that He wished to give it...”

Here, Cassuto attempts to vindicate his association of the Edenic serpent, even if only as symbol of evil, with the rebellious serpent of the poetic tradition, despite the significant logical contradictions evident in the Edenic description of the serpent as a creature of God. Cassuto makes clear that his use of an understanding of the serpent not inherent in the text (the serpent as evil) is justified because he does so in imitation of the Torah. He points out that the Torah, despite clearly rejecting representations of the serpents as rebellious in the poetic tradition, nevertheless accepts popular associations connecting evil and serpent, permitting serpents to be as symbols or agents of evil or wickedness -- even while Scripture identifies serpents as created by God,

But since in the popular thought and language the concept of *evil* was strongly associated with that of the *serpent*, it was possible for the Torah, without changing the attitude of the ancient poetic tradition, to use the accepted ideas and phraseology that were a *product* of that tradition, and hence to

¹³⁸ Cassuto, 141.

choose specifically the *serpent* out of the animal world a the symbol of evil....¹³⁹

Emphatic that the serpent in Genesis 3 must be interpreted only symbolically as evil, Cassuto insists the serpent should neither be assigned an existence that is in violation of its primary identity as a creature of God, nor interpreted to embody an existence in opposition to God:

...we have here only a symbol, and...must not regard the serpent an independent entity in opposition, as it were, to the Creator of the world, as the ancient traditions of the poets narrated, the Torah stressed at the very outset that the serpent belong to the category of the *beasts of the field that the Lord God had made*.¹⁴⁰

Cassuto purports to be giving careful attention to the identity of the serpent in Genesis 3 by suggesting that the symbolic existence of serpent as evil does not transgress to violate its nature (as a creature of God) as though suggesting an existence in opposition to God, “in order to make it quite clear that we have here only a symbol, and that we must not regard the serpent as an independent entity in opposition, as it were, to the Creator of the world...”¹⁴¹ But he offers no solution for how to understand the nature of a creature who is made by God, and yet assigned a symbolic nature that represents evil: an existence that is, by definition, in opposition to God.

Still, by combining accepted folk ideas, ancient poetic traditions, and established knowledge from the animal world, Cassuto appears to have found the serpent an identity as a symbol of evil able to account for its description as having cunning, and being among the

¹³⁹ Cassuto, 142.

¹⁴⁰ Cassuto, 142.

¹⁴¹ Cassuto, 142

“beasts of the field that the Lord God had made.”¹⁴²

The special characteristic the that bible attributes to the serpent is *cunning*, and since it does not ascribe any other quality to him, it intends, apparently, to convey that the evil flowing from the serpent emanated only from his *cunning*. In the ultimate analysis, what we have here is an allegorical allusion to the craftiness to be found in man himself.¹⁴³

The integrity of Cassuto’s arguments grow unexpectedly opaque as he suggests that in the absence of any other qualities assigned to the serpent, it is only the cunning of the serpent mediating evil. In the absence of supporting textual evidence or any compelling rhetorical logic, Cassuto’s conclusions seeking to isolate the evil symbolized by the serpent is suggestive of the logic of essentialisms: in a kind of disembodied deconstruction of the serpent, Cassuto abstracts the features of the serpent – as cunning, as evil, as symbol – until there is little to suggest the serpent possesses the substantive existence assigned to it by the text. When Cassuto abruptly chooses to appropriate the serpent in Genesis as a representation of humanity’s cunning, his interpretive innovations appear to relinquish the serpent’s identity as a “beast of the field that the Lord God had made.”¹⁴⁴ While this represents a clear contradiction of the text which accords to the serpent a creaturely existence, it remains to be seen whether this serpent’s identity as the voice of humanity’s cunning addresses the criteria previously associated with a serpent capable of speaking and

¹⁴² Cassuto, 142.

¹⁴³ Cassuto, 142.

¹⁴⁴ This invention of the serpent as the woman’s imaginings is suggestive of random eisogesis; it is a conclusion that is neither supported by the text nor the strength of the interpretation’s rhetorical momentum, i.e. if the serpent is only symbolic of the woman’s desires and fears, the progression of the interpretation could next, presumably, introduce the woman as merely a symbolic representation; why does Cassuto not interpret the woman as an allegorical allusion for the rebellious desires of the man? Furthermore, given the serpent is punished later in the chapter, does Cassuto suggest the serpent’s curse is symbolic, in which case, would all the curses in the passage be similarly interpreted as having only a symbolic existence?

having knowledge of the divine.

“In the ultimate analysis, we have here an allegorical illusion to the craftiness to be found in man himself.”¹⁴⁵ From this single allegory, Cassuto purports to address four exegetical concerns generated by the passage: Who is the serpent? What does the conversation between the serpent and woman concern? What does the woman reveal about humanity? And how does the conversation account for the nature and origin of evil in human experience? In answer to the question of the serpent’s nature, Cassuto suggests that it represents an allegorical allusion to humanity’s capacity for “slyness.” However, when pressed to establish the serpent’s identity, he concretizes the serpent’s identity as the voice of the “sly cunning of the woman.”¹⁴⁶

Having thus established the nature of the serpent, Cassuto further asserts that the dialogue between the serpent and the woman is a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde encounter between the woman’s innocence and her cunning.¹⁴⁷ Cassuto’s characterization of the woman – ill-equipped with an intelligence and self-awareness unable to distinguish between distorted perceptions and reality, and prone to imagining that the projection of her own desires represents the “secret intentions” of others -- offers an analysis of human nature as made vulnerable by ignorance and prone to distorted misperceptions.¹⁴⁸ Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Cassuto’s allegory offers an explanation of how it is that the good in creation transformed into corruption. How is it that evil gains foothold in the goodness of

¹⁴⁵ Cassuto, 143.

¹⁴⁶ Cassuto, 146-147. A question that comes to mind: Is Cassuto’s construction of the passage as allegory defensible and consistent with the nature of the passage, and the overall form of the text? What else does he construct as being allegorical in the first chapters of Genesis?

¹⁴⁷ Cassuto, 146.

¹⁴⁸ Cassuto, 147.

God's creation? Manifesting further Augustinian sensibilities, the fuller description of evil and explanation of its origin offered in Cassuto's allegorical analysis reveals how the combination of epistemological lack and desire for good converges in the woman to generate the possibility of violating God's prohibition.

Cassuto takes the opportunity to introduce a metaphor fundamental to his theological anthropology through his allegorical analysis of humanity. By virtue of the knowledge they lack, Cassuto speaks of primordial humanity as being "like children," indicating that in humanity-as-children this epistemological incapacity embodies a lack of moral discernment:

The man and his wife were, it is true, still devoid of comprehensive knowledge, like children who know neither good nor bad...¹⁴⁹

Thus ascribing to the man and woman the requisite deprivation of the knowledge of good and evil, Cassuto comes to a theological crossroads as he formulates his theodicy. Having determined that humanity is originally bereft of knowledge, he must account for why. Here, the issue of divine justice is at stake. If humanity is created lacking knowledge of good and evil, unable to discern between wrong and right, how is God just in issuing a prohibition that requires ability to know and choose between good and evil? Or is it the case that humanity does not need the knowledge that is lacking – but is otherwise equipped with all that is necessary to obey the divine prohibition? Either Cassuto must defend the loving goodness of God in creating a humanity lacking what which is good (rending a careful conception of divine nature that allows for the introduction or vulnerability to lack), or he must construct an understanding of humanity with all that is necessary to obey God. Does

¹⁴⁹ Cassuto, 142.

the problem lie with a flaw in God's nature or humanity's?

Adamant to defend God as immutable goodness, Augustine would chose the latter route.¹⁵⁰ Echoing this Augustinian preference to preserve the goodness and power of God, Cassuto resolves the theological dilemma at the heart of the problem of theodicy by conceptualizing humanity as children. His simple use of a developmental anthropology enables Cassuto to explain how humanity, characterized by a childlike ignorance and inability to make moral discernments, embodies a lack of knowledge that does not represent either a flawed design or failed goodness. He suggests that when understood through expectations consonant with the developmental capacities of children it becomes possible to appreciate that because moral distinctions and wisdom are cultivated through experience, the inability of humanity-as-children to manifest is temporary.

Furthermore, when analyzed through that goodness mediated by Augustine's principle of plenitude -- which presumes that all forms of existence, including those manifesting various levels of immaturity, limitation, or lack, are good by virtue of contributing to the perfection expressed when every potential form of existence is manifest in creation -- humanity-as-children embodies goodness by virtue of manifesting an epistemological maturity developmentally appropriate to children.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ "As to me...I firmly believed that you -- our Lord, the true God, who made not only our souls but our bodies, and not only our and bodies but all men and all things -- were undefilable and unalterable and in no way to be changed, and yet I could not understand clearly and distinctly what was the cause of evil. Whatever it might be, however, I did realize that my inquiry must not be carried out along lines, which would lead me to believe that the immutable God was mutable; if I did that I should become myself the very evil I was looking for. Book vii, 3.

¹⁵¹ Viewed through an Augustinian understanding of plenitude, the lack of wisdom attributed to humanity-as-children in Cassuto not only suggested an immaturity organic to the development of children, but argued that even their ignorance as children manifested a form of goodness contributing to the fullest expression of being in creation.

But a development model does not make immediately evident why humanity's suffering or struggling must represent, as they do in Genesis 3, justified condemnation and punishment by God. So Cassuto must introduce the element of sin that explains why struggle and suffering are visited upon humanity in Genesis 3. Cassuto does this by introducing a character flaw in humanity

Indeed, he argues that however much humanity is "...devoid of comprehensive knowledge, like children who know neither good nor bad," humanity's epistemological incapacity has not left humanity bereft of all knowledge or agency. According to Cassuto, even while lacking in wisdom, humanity retains a resourcefulness: "...even those who lack wisdom sometimes possess slyness." Exploring the qualities of "craftiness" "slyness" and "cunning," ascribed to humanity through his allegory to discern how humanity comes to come to violate a divine prohibition central to interpretations of Genesis 3 as a fall.¹⁵² Examining his use of "craftiness," "slyness" and "cunning" through an Augustinian understanding of evil reveals Cassuto's presumption that an interdependence of agency, knowledge, intention, and desire structuring the conditions necessary for future disobedience.

Cassuto first ascribes to humanity a "craftiness," a term connoting a strategic organization or exercise of knowledge. Yet, in that the context of its usage fails to associate this craftiness with any absence or distortion of good, the resourcefulness energizing craftiness as a strategic practice of knowing appears to embody no problematic disposition. Further relating "slyness" and epistemological capacity in his description of humanity-as-children, Cassuto establishes a definition of "slyness" as based on what it lacks: wisdom.

Inherently Augustinian, as a deprivation of comprehensive knowledge or an absence of wisdom, Cassuto's conceptualization of "slyness" emerges as owing its existence to a deprivation of that good-represented-by-wisdom. And though representing wisdom's absence, "slyness" retains through its association with wisdom the identity as an epistemological orientation or a practice of knowing. Significantly, in that humanity is described as "possessing slyness," the phrase appears to suggest humanity is empowered with some agency (connoting ability to choose or decide). When engendered together with "craftiness," what is initially understood as a knowing humanity possesses, now emerges as a strategic practice of knowing giving agency to humanity, or a practice of knowing oriented by a strategic resourcefulness.

Lastly, examining Cassuto's description of "cunning" brings to light an implicit connection between virtue or virtuous behavior and knowledge. More specifically, in the absence of that experiential or distilled knowledge associated with wisdom, Cassuto suggests humanity's behavior is impacted so profoundly that virtue cannot be cultivated apart from it. Conversely, in the absence of wisdom, "cunning" reveals a practice of knowledge producing behavior that is lacking in virtue, or rather, unable to produce virtuous behavior. Cassuto's use of "craftiness," "slyness" and "cunning," shows how human agency is so severely impeded by this lack of wisdom that all practices of knowing, no matter how strategically oriented, fail to cultivate virtue. In fact, Cassuto's allegory reveals that the evil of ignorance can only generate distortions of virtue that eventually manifest in disobedience. Indeed, in that ignorance (as a deprivation of wisdom) emerges as the portal through which evil is manifest, he makes evident that a natural vulnerability inherent in humanity's epistemological immaturity is the source of humanity's failure to discern.

Given that a vulnerability in human knowledge becomes the occasion for evil, how

does Cassuto describe the particularities of the process by which human vulnerability is exploited? We turn to his description of the woman's cunning in order to grasp how the reality of failed discernment leads to disobedience. Cassuto's allegory suggests that distortions develop in the woman's perceptions of reality as she practices knowing without the insights of wisdom to alleviate her ignorance. The vulnerability inherent in the humanity's lack of moral discernment comes to haunt the woman: in the foolishness of her ignorance, she begins to draw ominous inferences from the fact that God's prohibition against eating is restricted to a single tree. She asks herself, 'Has God then forbidden us all the trees of the garden?' 'Surely not,' she answers herself in her simplicity; 'He forbade us only the tree in the middle of the garden.'" ¹⁵³

Positing that she "thinks she has discovered herein the reason for the prohibition,"¹⁵⁴ Cassuto ascribes to her a fundamental distortion of perception:

In the manner of a sly person who considers herself extremely clever when she imputes cunning to other people and imagines that she has thereby discovered their secret intentions... ¹⁵⁵

Interpreted by Cassuto, the woman (in the deluded understanding of her cunning) additionally lacks the intelligence of self-awareness to discern that she is, in fact, projecting the evil machinations of her own imagination onto others. This leads her to being further deceived by the distorted possibilities suggested by her imagination. The woman's suspicions cause her to misjudge God's motivation. As Cassuto constructs the mistaken logic that leads to her error, he ascribes to the woman a slyness that is characteristic of someone who presumes with misplaced arrogance that she is "extremely clever" in having

¹⁵³ Cassuto, 143

¹⁵⁴ Cassuto, 146.

¹⁵⁵ Cassuto, 143

uncovered what she deems to be the “secret intentions” of others -- in this case, God.

Cassuto ascribes to the woman paranoia about God’s jealousy that causes her to invent a rationale connecting her suspicion of God’s jealousy with the subsequent prohibition against humanity eating of the tree:

In that case, just as the prohibition is restricted to this tree, so much the reason for it inheres in the nature of this tree, which bestows the knowledge of good and evil; undoubtedly, the interdict was not imposed upon us in order to preserve us from death but because God who knows good and evil is jealous of us and does not wish us to have knowledge of good and evil like Himself.¹⁵⁶

According to Cassuto, the woman not only has the audacity to assume that God has lied about the consequences of eating of the tree, but insofar as the prohibition applies only to “the tree that bestows the knowledge of good and evil,” the woman erroneously concludes that the reason for the prohibition does not concern protecting humanity from death, but rather a self-protective jealousy on God’s part:

...must be none other than God’s jealousy. He who *knows* everything (not without reason is it said here, *For God knows*) does not wish his creatures to possess the same knowledge as Himself.¹⁵⁷

Yet Cassuto fails to recognize the good he accords to the woman in his interpretation. He does not pause to consider that: what causes the woman to think and act with evil actually reveals a motivation of a different order. Presumably without intending to do so, Cassuto inadvertently assigns to the woman a motivation more original to her actions than fear. It emerges as we interrogate what the woman suspects God of doing. Examining

¹⁵⁶ Cassuto, 143.

¹⁵⁷ Cassuto, 146.

the concerns Cassuto assigns to the woman, she imagines God so anxious with protective jealousy that it becomes possible to conceive of God as misdirecting humanity even by the threat of death. The woman's suspicions of God give rise to the awareness that she is concerned not to be deprived, and while Cassuto sees no need to confirm whether the woman find God to be guarding something she herself desires, her interpretation of God's jealous protection translates inherently as a resistance to being deprived of that which God clearly values. Conversely expressed, the woman's suspicions of God suggest that she *desires not to be deprived of something valuable, or otherwise good.*

Because Cassuto blames the woman's fear of being deprived of the good leads her to misjudge God's knowledge and motivation, he does not find reason to explore the implication that her desire for that which is valued as good suggests the possibility that she seeks from virtue to avoid being deprived of that which would be good. Unable to trust God's nature, Cassuto deems the woman as foolish in her consequent refusal to heed God's prohibition and subsequent decision to seek the good she supposes God to be withholding: "On the basis of this conclusion she acted as she did."¹⁵⁸

We should be clear: as the substance of his conjectures about the woman's motives, desires, and intent are neither substantiated by the text nor original to it, Cassuto's misogynistic presumptions clearly undermines the capacity of his allegory to represent an exegesis of the text. What redemptive possibilities reside in Cassuto's rendering of the serpent emerges through a critical appropriation of his allegory: not as an exegesis of the text, but as an exposition of the processes that make evil manifest. The strength of Cassuto's exposition of the woman's reflective processes lies in his nuanced analysis of how

¹⁵⁸ Cassuto, 142-143.

distortion infects the woman's perception, and his recognition that the corruption of her desire victimizes her ability to discern and will from reality. Indeed, embedded in Cassuto's account of how the evil of ignorance defrauds the woman through an adulteration of her desires, is a more profound discernment of how corruption emerges in humanity.

Yet, too, emerging through Cassuto's analysis is an inherent recognition that must be acknowledged: in order for something to become distorted or corrupted, it must at one point have embodied the good. As Augustine frames it, "...things which are subject to corruption are good."¹⁵⁹ Closer attention to the Cassuto's assessment of how the woman comes to misperception the intentions of God reveals the presumption of a theological structure echoing Augustine's development of the notions of original sin and original righteousness. So too, in Cassuto's analysis of the woman, there is implied that a goodness has becomes corrupted.

In order to suggest, as Cassuto does, that the woman fears God's jealousy, it is implied that the woman fears being deprived of some goodness, something of value, that merits God's jealousy or protective withholding.¹⁶⁰ Even in that Cassuto indicts the woman, "she is particularly grieved that this tree, which is of outstanding significance, should be prohibited."¹⁶¹ In order for the woman to be accused of fearing God's jealousy, it must be presumed that the woman has a *desire for the good* that is being tyrannized by the anxious awareness of potential loss. Yet while Cassuto's condemns her misperception and misjudgment of God's motives, nothing is recognized of the soundness associated with being deprived of that which is so good God would be jealous of sharing it (!). Since virtue

¹⁵⁹ "And it became clear to me that things which are subject to corruption are good." *Confessions*, Book vii., 12.

¹⁶⁰ Cassuto, 143.

¹⁶¹ Cassuto, 144.

begins with a desire for the good, and we are told the woman fears because she may lose something she perceives to be of “outstanding significance,”¹⁶² then Augustine’s understanding of evil helps us recognize that Cassuto’s description of the woman’s cunning is the result of a corruption of that which first exists as a good. If the woman’s fear is most originally a desire not to be without which is good, and she does not error in her judgment that what is desired is good (so God she suspects God is trying to deprive her of it) then as erroneous as her conclusions may be, an Augustinian understanding of evil gives us grounds to recognize: that there is both goodness in the woman’s desire, as well as virtue in her desiring that which is good. Where Cassuto fails to see the goodness implicit in the woman’s fear of being deprived of the good she is designed to desire, an Augustinian analysis of Cassuto’s exposition reveals that woman’s profoundly allergic reaction to being deprived of a good/ness is fundamentally a feature of wisdom: a fear of lacking the good essential to her well-being.

Finally, through the perspective of Augustine’s aesthetic optimism it becomes possible to recognize other elements in the woman’s negotiation of her perceptions and desire, unaccounted for in Cassuto’s discerning analysis. For instance, Cassuto fails to recognize that the woman’s fear of being deprived exposes a fundamental intelligence on her part: 1) that what woman desires is said to be something good, makes her an expression of virtue; 2) just as desiring the good is a virtue, being afraid of losing something good is a response of a sound mind as well as virtuous desire; 3) even if unfounded (as Cassuto clearly suggests the woman’s fears are) wanting to protect her self from being deprived of good, or acting to prevent herself from loss of good, are not pathological desires or suggestive of a

¹⁶² Cassuto, 144.

lacking intelligence. In all fairness, what Cassuto's assessment implies about the woman -- even while in deriding her for indulging a misplaced suspicion of God and acting from paranoid fear -- is that she has the capacity to recognize what is good, has the intelligence to desire it, seeks to protect herself against the loss of good, and is even described as entertaining suspicions of anyone claiming to love while withholding good, is not suggestive of someone lacking in discernment. Instead, it is possible to construct an understanding of the woman based on Cassuto's description of her flaws (imaginative paranoia about God) that recognizes the woman as exercising attentiveness from a diligent desire to embrace and secure what goodness appears within her reach. What is presumed in the Cassuto's assessment of the woman functions to challenge his own conclusions. He misses the fact that the woman's fear of losing the good presumes not only a sound desire for the good an intelligence that recognizes it is not good to be without that which is good. Moreover, even where Cassuto suggests that the woman is evil to mistakenly judge God as jealous and suspects him of acting duplicitously towards humanity, Cassuto he fails to recognize that the woman's wariness of being deprived of good is, in fact, a rooted in a sound desire for both what is good and the good of self-protection. Indeed, Cassuto's analysis also fails to perceive the responsible exercise of agency implied in the woman diligently taking responsibility for being alert to protect herself from the loss of good. Finally, however much Cassuto insists the woman is influence by evil in her suspicion of God acting jealously to withhold good, we would be remiss not to affirm the soundness evident in the woman's suspicion and mistrust if she suspects (however misguidedly) that an authority is exercising power deceptively or contriving to deny the woman a valued good.

Also apparent through Cassuto's analysis of the sinfulness of woman's cunning is that he ultimately conceptualizes evil as a privation of good. According to Cassuto, it is her

distorted perception of reality that is responsible for leading to the subsequent corruption of the woman's desire, even resulting in her turning away from God. In such a description, we hear echoes of the Augustinian understanding of the two-fold nature of evil: 1) that it is manifest as a turning away from God,¹⁶³ and 2) that reveals that evil involves "...the corruption of a good substance; it is the privation of some good proper to the world as God made it."¹⁶⁴ Yet, while describing woman's desire as becoming corrupted, Cassuto's allegory fails to explicitly account for *how* woman's perception of God becomes distorted in the first place. While he suggests the later that the corruption characterizes the woman's knowing, resulting in an irrational paranoia that eventually causes her to act against God, it is not clear from his analysis, how such a corruption of knowledge takes hold in the first place?

Here, it maybe helpful to recall the earlier distinction made by Cassuto between the "abstract" and "philosophical" concerns of "the Hellene," and the more "practical" desire for "moral education" and "guidance" that he associates with "the Semitic way." With such distinctions in mind, we may well say that the more "Hellene," or philosophical-orientation of Augustine's theological paradigm identifies the category of free will as the most compelling opportunity for the corruption of human desire. However, our analysis of Cassuto's depiction of woman's cunning reveals that he implicates *another human capacity* in the corruption that turns humanity away from God. Perhaps inspired by what he associates with "the Semite's" concern for:

...the practical purpose of proving moral instruction and of
assuaging *the feeling of perplexity in the heart of man*, who finds a

¹⁶³ "And I asked: 'What is wickedness?' and found that it is not a substance but a perversity of will turning away from you, God, the supreme substance, toward lower things -- casting away, as it were, its own insides, and swelling with desire for what is outside it." [Book vii, 16. *Confessions*, 153.](#)

¹⁶⁴ Hick, 59.

contraction between the Creator's paternal love and the multitudinous troubles that throngs the world... [*Italics mine, M.K.*]¹⁶⁵

Here, Cassuto's analysis of the corruption original to humanity's disobedience appears to reveal the origin of evil to be introduced by a human vulnerability of another order, inviting a re-examination of Cassuto's condemnation of the woman. Cassuto theorizes that the fundamental misperception of God as jealous becomes the cause of the woman's distrust of God's prohibition. Her distorted understanding of God as desiring leads the woman to "cunningly" misjudge God as lying about the consequences of eating of the tree of knowledge, and then to further imagine that God desires to withhold good from her. Cassuto reminds, "On the basis of this conclusion she acted as she did,"¹⁶⁶ establishing that he interprets the corruption of woman's desire as emerging from *a fundamental distortion of God as jealous*. Yet significantly, by his own admission, Cassuto offers: "The concept of God's jealousy, which many modern expositors regard as a doctrine taught here by Scripture itself, is, in truth, only an inference drawn by the serpent or the woman."¹⁶⁷ So why, if (as Cassuto points out) the long tradition of interpreting God as jealousy protective of the divine knowledge of good and evil, can only be suggested through mere inference – and even then only expressed as the distorted imaginings of serpentine desire – does Cassuto continue to retain it as having exegetical currency? In discerning what is at stake in Cassuto retaining the inference of God's jealousy, we come to a clarity about the origin of evil in Cassuto's theological anthropology.

Cassuto's allegory describes woman as deceived into imaging God as jealous. His

¹⁶⁵ Cassuto, 139.

¹⁶⁶ Cassuto, 142-143.

¹⁶⁷ He adds, "...for the interpretation of verse 24, see the commentary *ibid.*" Cassuto, 146.

analysis of the woman's perceptions suggests the presence of a reciprocal jealousy towards God that further distorts her grasp of reality; moreover, inflamed by such distortions, Cassuto's exposition implies the woman's desire becomes corrupted by the fear that God intends to deprive her of some good. The serpent then, as the voice of woman's cunning, does not only represent Cassuto's accounting of the woman's logic and motivation in disregarding God's prohibition, but symbolizes the woman's capacity for *imagination*. He writes:

Thus, we need not wonder at the serpent's knowledge of the prohibition; it is the woman who is aware of it. Nor should we be surprised that he knows the purpose of the Lord God; it is the woman who *imagines* that she has plumbed the Divine intention – but is quite mistaken!¹⁶⁸ [*Italics mine. M.K.*]

At the core of Cassuto's condemnation of the woman's cunning is her fundamental mistake in *imagining* that she has discerned the depths of Divine intention. Understood thus, Cassuto's allegorical description and analysis of the serpent as woman's cunning, reveals his perception that humanity's fundamental vulnerability is not exposed by the capacity for free will, but revealed to be the profoundly distorting and deceptive nature of the human imagination. *What introduces the disruption of Eden's idyll then, is not desire corrupted by freedom but desire deceived by imagination.* Evidence of Cassuto's condemnation of human imagination is evident throughout his exposition of the chapter, most particularly as he describes and analyzes that which makes the woman culpable. Consider, the role of imagination in Cassuto's construction of what makes the woman culpable and the man innocent of blame, in Genesis 3:6,

In the imagination the woman magnifies the effects of the eating amazingly; possibly, for the very reason that a woman's

¹⁶⁸ Italics mine. Cassuto, 143.

imagination surpasses a man's, it was the woman who was enticed first.¹⁶⁹

Fundamentally, it is the woman's overactive imagination Cassuto blames, as impeding the woman's epistemological capacities. It is the woman's vulnerability to the fictions of imagination that originates the distortions which obstruct her grasp of reality: "she imagines" God is jealous, just as it is her imagination that "greatly magnifies" the desirability of the tree of knowledge, leading to the corruption of her desire, and ultimately results in her turning away from God. As Cassuto constructs his parable to fill in the pieces missing in his accounting of how evil enters human experience, he does not appear to offer an Augustinian reclamation of free will. However, Cassuto's reasons for condemning the woman's cunning parallels the features of "primary sin" for which Augustine indicts' humanity: a corruption of human desire responding to God in pride and rebellion.

Guided by an Augustinian clarity that the nature of evil must proceed an understanding of its origin,¹⁷⁰ Cassuto emerges as condemning woman's susceptibility to the suggestive distortions of imagination. But there is a subtle distinction to be made in Cassuto's condemnation: what is at stake is a distinction between perceiving reality as it is and substitution offered by the imagination, which distorts reality. Cassuto condemns the woman for confusing what she imagines, with reality. This becomes all the more evident as Cassuto frames the subject of his condemnation: "the woman who imagines that she has plumbed the Divine intention – but is quite mistaken!"¹⁷¹ The primary concern is not located in a failed perception of reality; the woman is not condemned because she fails to

¹⁶⁹ Cassuto, 147.

¹⁷⁰ Nature precedes origin. Hick,

¹⁷¹ Cassuto, 143.

grasp the nature of God (as motivated by jealousy, and a desire to withhold good).¹⁷²

Rather, she is condemned because she *imagines* she has grasped it. Cassuto's analysis of the woman's cunning suggests that the imagination's penchant for distortion manages to precipitate the very deprivation of good it seeks to circumvent. Given that the "good" implicitly assumed in having a knowledge of God is consistent with reality (instead of a distorted knowledge of God as jealous) a knowledge of reality qua reality is lost when imagination distorts perception, therefore the woman's cunning distortedly perceives God as jealous.

Likewise, what is also embedded in Cassuto's condemnation of the distortions that trouble the woman's perception of God's motives and desires is the more fundamental recognition that human imagination lies at the heart of the distortion fueling the woman's fearful cunning. Cassuto, like Augustine, is not mistaken in recognizing that a fearful corruption lies at the heart of humanity's desire to guard against a perceived loss of potential good. Moreover, adding to the insightfulness of Cassuto's commentary is the implicit understanding that human imagination has the power to contribute to the faltering and failure of humanity's other capacities. Artful though Cassuto's parable of the serpent as the woman's cunning may be, it nevertheless grasps how fearful imaginings are able to block clarity in human logic, as well as invite the corruption of human desires.

Recognizing imagination as that human faculty most vulnerable to corruption, the woman's perception of God's goodness and justice becomes distorted is evidence to Cassuto that in the over-abundance of woman's imagination resides corrupting influence upon

¹⁷² Cassuto, 143.

human existence.¹⁷³ His critique of woman's imagination becomes more specific in Cassuto's exposition of Genesis 3:6. Cassuto clearly problematizes woman's imagination, insisting it plagues her ability to grasp reality, and "possibly, for the very reason that a woman's imagination surpasses a man's, it was the woman who was enticed first."¹⁷⁴ Cassuto appears now to wholeheartedly embrace an Augustinian view of sin as corruption. Indeed, the woman's mere perception of being deprived of the good is sufficient to effect a corruption of her desires, re-orienting her desires away from the highest good that is God, towards possessing what Augustine called those "lesser goods". Thus, here at the intersection of woman's distorted desire and fearful imagination, humanity's corruption appears to usher in evil, making plain Cassuto's earlier assertion that "man corrupts [the goodness of creation] by his conduct and brings evil into the world as a result of his corruption."¹⁷⁵

Still, while Cassuto's allegorical allusion does not lack for insightfulness, the gift of his discernment fails to erase the problematic issue of ontological reliability haunting the clarity at the core of his exposition. First, in seeking to account for the identity and nature of the serpent, Cassuto innovates an allegorical comparison conceptualizing the serpent as the voice of woman's cunning in the absence of any textual substantiation that cunning was assigned to the woman. The same paucity of textual substantiation applies to his efforts to describe or analyze the nature of it. What he offers in place of exposing the text of Genesis itself is an elaborate exposition of his allegorical construction to explain the significance of new concepts and content he has imported to the text. Indeed, having previously rejected

¹⁷³ Cassuto, 147.

¹⁷⁴ Cassuto, 147.

¹⁷⁵ Cassuto, 71.

other interpretations of the serpent as Satan “representing a kind of evil in the human heart” on the basis that they “[imported] meanings not original to the text,”¹⁷⁶ Cassuto violates the same principle, even unto rendering the serpent as “representing a kind of evil in the human heart”¹⁷⁷ thus presenting himself the same interpretations he dismissed. In this, he violates a key exegetical principle fundamental to his critiques of other interpretations of Genesis.¹⁷⁸

Secondly, Cassuto articulates an understanding of the woman as corrupted and inferior, importing an anthropology not substantiated by any descriptions found in Genesis 1-3. In his characterization of woman as embodying deplorable cunning and self-aggrandizing vanity, with paranoid suspicions of God’s jealousy, foolish self-overestimation, and an inability to perceive reality, Cassuto invents information about the woman not evidenced in the text, imputing to her qualities nowhere ascribed to her in Genesis 3, or in the chapters immediately before and after that chapter.¹⁷⁹

Ironically, Cassuto’s critical condemnations of the woman’s cunning appear to offer the most insightful understanding of the nature of his comments in this section. As we turn the mirror of Cassuto’s condemnations (of the woman’s cunning) on his own work, the allegory illumines the preoccupations at the core of Cassuto’s concerns. As he projects the serpents’ words onto the woman –complicated by imported nuances of motive, intelligence

¹⁷⁶ Cassuto, 139.

¹⁷⁷ Even if Cassuto could somehow justify his allegory as inspired by an ancient Israelite tradition of symbolizing the serpent as an evil familiar to the biblical tradition, to maintain the serpent is a symbol of evil, it remains that his own allegory of the serpent as the woman’s cunning too closely resembles the serpent as “representing a kind of evil in the human heart,” not to invite continued speculation about hypocrisy.

¹⁷⁸ We are hard pressed to identify in the allegory the substance of what is presented in the text – beyond the existence of a serpent and woman who are in conversation discussing a divine prohibition.

¹⁷⁹ All evidence to the contrary, if the woman’s speech is suggestive of any characteristics, her speech suggests no duplicity, no deception.

and imagination – he insists, “Only in this way can we understand why the serpent is said to think and speak; in reality it is not [the serpent] that thinks and speaks but the woman does so in her heart.” But were we to transfer the various invented motives, thoughts and imaginings projected on the one who designed them, an insightful description of Cassuto’s priorities appears to emerge from the text: “Only in this way can we understand why [the woman’s cunning] is said to think and speak [as a serpent]; in reality, it is not the [woman] that thinks and speaks [as the woman’s cunning], but Cassuto that does so [speaks of the woman’s cunning] in his heart.”

There is more evidence of this in his misleading introduction to the allegory. Declaring that, “In the ultimate analysis, we have here an allegorical allusion to the craftiness to be found in man himself,” Cassuto draws from his recognition that the serpent functioned symbolically to represent evil for ancient Israelites. Able to assert the serpent identity can be represented symbolically, Cassuto interprets the serpent as a symbol of the craftiness of humanity. Yet despite this claim – that the craftiness is representative of humanity in general, because Cassuto relies solely on a description of cunning he ascribes to the woman, his interpretation repeatedly identifies the serpent as the woman’s cunning, and fail to make any generic reference to “humanity’s cunning.” Indeed, in that Cassuto imports so much of the content for his allegorical allusion about the serpent from beyond the text – including the fundamental assertion and descriptions of the woman’s perception, intelligence and motive as all corrupted – that, in the ultimate analysis, it becomes evident that Cassuto offers not so much an exegesis of the text, but an allegory for Cassuto’s own preoccupation with the patriarchal construction of woman through the text.

Moreover, as his portrayal of the serpent develops exclusively as a negative personification of woman’s cunning, this view of woman as inferior and flawed finds

parallels in the misogynistic legacy of patriarchal and Augustinian theologies within the Christian tradition. In these traditions, such anthropologies simultaneously occasion derivative ideologies of male superiority/authority and condone practices ordaining the subordination of women in their relationships with others. Often, the corresponding anthropology for the man characterizes him as superior by the absence of those defects associated with woman. This is the case with Cassuto's exposition of the man in Genesis 3.6.¹⁸⁰ Suggesting that it is for the sake of protecting all from the harm generated, whether inadvertent or intentional, by some aspect of the woman's inferior existence, the logic of paternalism vindicates itself as a necessary and merciful wisdom, designed even to protect women from themselves and thereby, supposedly, empower women.¹⁸¹

All the while, apparently without self-reflexivity, insisting on woman's subservience to more superior authorities is a necessary good to them from the harm she might do to herself, or from the harm she might do others, preventing those might seek to take advantage of, or exploit the vulnerabilities inherent in her those of her gender – as though the ideology of paternalism and patriarchy did not violate that very trust.

A Human Vocation: Cultivating the Likeness of God

Genesis 3.6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

¹⁸⁰ ** develop this with more details on C's depiction of the man.

¹⁸¹ Augustinian theology projects the most desirable social characteristics onto God as only God's attributes, and Patriarchy projects them unto man – as being only subordinate to God -- as being only rightfully and best manifest in men.

Before offering commentary on the passage accounting for the woman's experience of the tree, Cassuto begins by elucidating that the nuance of the word "saw" in the phrase "and when the woman saw" connotes giving heed, or perceiving.¹⁸² But most significantly, he comments here that there is something unusual in the usage of the words and phrases, noting, "The Bible appears to give these phrases meanings that generally are, to some extent, new and different [from Genesis 2.9 in which these phrases and words are first introduced]:"¹⁸³

The woman noted that the tree was good for food, that is, that it was not only pleasant flavor

(perhaps she was able to judge the taste by the fragrance), but also, and particularly, that it was *good to eat*, because the eating thereof raised one to an *'Elohim*-like plane.

And that it was a delight to the eye: not only by virtue of beauty, which charmed the eye, but also, and more especially, because through eating it *the eyes were opened* (and your eyes will be opened, we read in the previous verse).

And that the tree was to be desired to make one wise:¹⁸⁴ not just *nechmahd* ['pleasant'] *to the sight*, as is phrased above, but also, and in particular, *nechamahd* ['to be desired'] in the sense that by eating of it one acquired discernment and knowledge.¹⁸⁵

Cassuto's comment, "the Bible appears to give these phrases meanings that generally are, to some extent, new and different" is compelling. A hospitable re-appropriation of his beautiful rendering of the nuances in the phrases, what emerges is not so much that the phrases are given new meanings, as he frames it, but rather that the phrases permit the

¹⁸² Cassuto, 147.

¹⁸³ Cassuto, 147.

¹⁸⁴ Niphal: of *chamad* = *nechamahd* to desire for oneself, desire concerning oneself, to be desired (for one's self) (02530)

¹⁸⁵ Cassuto, 147.

reader to understand that, in fact, a new reality is unfolding before the woman's very eyes. However, we must return to explore the significance, because a more troubling concern emerges as Cassuto's analysis continues. In commenting on the woman's experience of giving heed to the threefold goodness of the tree, Cassuto's tone is strangely critical, even unexpectedly flippant:

In the imagination the woman magnifies the effects of the eating amazingly; possibly, for the very reason that a woman's imagination surpasses a man's, it was the woman who was enticed first.¹⁸⁶

Cassuto supposes that such a description of the woman's experience of the threefold goodness of the tree is the only significance of this verse that merits articulating, and he involves the suggestion that the woman's imagination skews her judgment so that she does not perceive the reality of the fruit as it is. Interestingly, Cassuto does comment that the word for *see* offered here in its *qual* form is the same word used to describe God's seeing in each of the seven instances it occurs in Gen 1. It is evident that the seeing the woman does is a giving heed, a perceiving that suggests seeing things in their full reality – as they truly are – strengthening our suggestion that, in the woman's actions, she is acting in the very likeness of God and in the connotation that Cassuto supplies (though his intent may have been otherwise).

Cassuto does not note that the word *chamad* translated "desired" in the phrase "was desired to make one wise" is the same *chamad* used in the Genesis 2:9 phrase "every tree that is pleasant to the sight," describing the pleasant nature of the trees God chooses to plant in Eden. Had he done so, this parallel usage of the word would have refuted his contention, chastising his condescension in dismissing what the woman was perceiving, which was not

¹⁸⁶ Cassuto, 147.

imagined hyperbole, but, in fact, clear-minded in its consistency with what the biblical writer indicates to be the case of the trees in the previous verse.¹⁸⁷

Cassuto's interpretation appears to dis/miss several aspects significant in the woman's lengthy consideration of the nature of the fruit: 1) in her assessment, the woman engages in a careful and thorough process of discernment and, according to the biblical writer, is accurate in her assessment of the threefold goodness of the fruit; 2) in this thoughtful reflection of the goodness of creation, the woman imitates two practices said to characterize God in Genesis 1. Despite the fact that the woman's activity in Genesis 3.6 replicates that ascribed also of God in Genesis 1, "And God saw that it was good" Cassuto fails to comment on the clear mirroring between the woman's activity and Gods, two chapters prior. Instead, Cassuto refers instead to a far more circuitous relation between the woman's "seeing" in Genesis 3.6 and that ascribed of Leah in Genesis 9, where the only commonality between the two usages is presumably the fact of gender: both are woman who are doing the "seeing." Here again, the preoccupation with gender evidenced in Cassuto appears to misguide his exposition as we find him ignoring or missing connections that have clear strength of association, in favor of inventing connections that raise questions about significance based on associations forced by gender.

187 Chamad (Het, maim, dalet) Strong's concordance (02530)

meaning: 1. to desire, covet, take pleasure in, delight in:

1) Qual = to desire 2) Niphal = to be desirable

3) Piel = to delight greatly, desire greatly

2. desirableness, preciousness

Used in Gen 2:9 of God: every tree that is pleasant to the sight

Used in Gen 3:6: and that the tree was to be desired (Niphal) to make one wise...

Used in Ex 20:17: thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife

Psa 19:10 More to be desired than gold

Psa 68:16 the hills that God desireth to dwell in

Thus, God is described as 1) taking time to consider, regard, and attend to knowing creation; then with that discernment God 2) relates to the goodness perceived therein by delighting in it. As made painfully evident through the meanings Cassuto extrapolates from Genesis 1:1, his Augustinian perception of the woman as corrupted by a prideful rebellion against God sizes up the woman's activity as a foolish indulgence of overactive imagining. It is clear that Cassuto intends to be suggestive of man's superiority over the woman in making his subsequent point that her superior imagination is possibly the determining factor in what made her more vulnerable "to be enticed" – or corrupted – than the man. Cassuto's Augustinian interpretation of the woman's nature prevents him from recognizing that, in reality, beyond the distortions of his stereotypical perception of the woman, the woman is thoughtfully engaged in the very practices that fulfill her nature as one made to reflect the likeness of God. And rather than engaging in the fantasizing of her imagination, the woman is faithfully exercising her God-like ability to perceive the three-fold goodness of the tree – attending to all the manifold goodness in that manifestation of God's creation. He chooses instead to note:

"And she took of its fruit and ate." Perception and flight of imagination were followed immediately by decision and action. The extreme brevity of this part of the sentence, in contrast to the length of the first section of the verse, indicates the swiftness of the action.¹⁸⁸

Cassuto characterizes the woman as following "perception and flight of imagination" "immediately" with decision and action. In particular, her "swiftness of action," from his description of her being lost in "flights of imagination" causes her to greatly overestimate

¹⁸⁸ Cassuto's comments about the swiftness with which the woman acts to eat of the tree are better understood in light of his comments here. Cassuto, 147.

the benefits of the fruit and to “magnify the effects of eating the fruit amazingly.”¹⁸⁹ In doing so, he suggests she has acted too quickly, with undue haste, and rushed to eat the fruit, blinded by desire, deficient of due consideration.

Lost to Cassuto’s patriarchal imaginings, another reality is evident: present to others reading with eyes not covered by scales of imagined superiority. Consider: the woman is engaged in a process of attentive discernment, fueled by the desire to be faithful in pursuing that which God calls her to be, desiring to fulfill her nature as one called to be like God. Ever since she has heard from the serpent that, in lacking the knowledge of good and evil, she will not be fulfilling her vocation to be like God, the woman has been engaged in a process of discernment. Contrary to what Cassuto seems to imply with his suggestion, she has done anything but rush her decision. In fact, the first portions of 3:6 show she does not capitulate responsibility for determining what is true and what is not; rather, she takes responsibility for discerning to the best of her abilities whether and what possibilities of goodness and faithfulness reside in the fruit. And, as implied by the contrast made by Cassuto’s own admission, her discernment process is not by any means short, swift, or brief – as if deficient of any due consideration.

Cassuto’s comments about the swiftness with which the woman acts to eat of the tree are underscored by his continued emphasis on speed, and this is where he reveals his true philosophical bias and the root of his vilification of woman and defense of man:

And she also gave some to her husband with her and he ate. Here, too, we have extreme brevity, and this terseness likewise betokens the celerity with which the deed was performed. In regard to the man, the Bible does not state his motives for eating, as in the case of the woman, since of him it suffices that she is the one who gives him the fruit. It is the

¹⁸⁹ Cassuto, 146.

way of the world for the man to be easily swayed by the woman.¹⁹⁰

Cassuto's comments about the man in Genesis 3.6 are suggestive of a clear reluctance to associate the man with the flaws that he has already attributed to woman.¹⁹¹ Cassuto makes no reference to the man independent of woman. When the man does eat the fruit of the tree, it is not because he was seduced by a corruption in his being; it was not rebellious desire to outsmart God; nor was it the arrogant desire to be like God. And he was not deceived about the quality or character of the fruit by the delusions of an over-active imagination. Instead, when the man eats the fruit, it is from a *weakness* in his ability to resist the woman, not a corruption in his abilities. Cassuto even goes so far as to suggest the man's disempowerment is an ontological reality as long as he shares a reality with the woman: "It is the way of the world for the man to be easily swayed by the woman."¹⁹²

Again, while insisting "the Bible does not state his motives for eating" – a fact that Cassuto takes as confirmation of the man's blamelessness in his comparison of the man's actions with the suggestion that the woman's motive has been satisfactorily established (along with connotations of guilt associated with being deluded by the distorted perceptions of her own cunning and corrupted desire). Significantly, Cassuto's refusal to acknowledge the man as participating and taking any responsibility in eating the fruit extends to suggesting that the woman sharing the fruit with him somehow supplants or erases any motive or responsibility on the man's part for accepting the fruit "since for him it suffices that she is

¹⁹⁰ Cassuto, 148.

¹⁹¹ Generally, when man's perception is exercised, it is reliable because his intelligence and desires are not vulnerable to the influence of an excitable and over-active imagination. He is afflicted with less imagination than woman (he is not drawn into conversation with the serpent, he is not tempted to explore the desirability of the tree of knowledge, and his imagination does not exaggerate the attractiveness of the tree).

¹⁹² Cassuto, 148.

the one who gives him the fruit,” and thereafter, to eat it. He makes this assertion despite the fact that the passage only describes the woman giving the man the fruit, without explanations of motive; likewise, the text only indicates man eating the fruit, and no motive is offered (as Cassuto is committed to suggesting).¹⁹³

Cassuto takes his rejection of man’s responsibility for his actions in the context of the verse further, adding to the phrase, *with her* the expository comments,

With her [‘mmah] expressions of this kind [‘im or ‘eth “with” with the pronominal suffixes) occur as a rule when a person is said to associate himself in a given action with someone who leads him. Examples are: you, your sons, your wife, and your son’s wives with you, (Gen 7.18)¹⁹⁴

It not clear why the woman is with the man; however, insofar as Cassuto interprets the man as being with the woman, but having nothing to do with any of the decisions involved (perhaps hoping to save him from being culpable for what Cassuto interprets to be disobedience), he fails to realize that he nevertheless indicts the man. Consider: in portraying the man as utterly passive, unquestioning, even to the point of eating the fruit with his only reason for eating being that “for him it suffices that she is the one who gives him the fruit,” Cassuto states that the man by virtue of a gendered destiny is without culpability. He argues, “It is the way of the world for the man to be easily swayed by the woman.”¹⁹⁵

The logic in these arguments proving woman’s culpability states that the man is not responsible for any resulting disobedience because: 1) he relies implicitly on the woman, making the woman responsible for misguiding him or, in whatever other ways, failing to be

¹⁹³ Cassuto, 148.

¹⁹⁴ Cassuto, 148.

¹⁹⁵ Cassuto, 148.

responsible about the man's utter dependence on her; or 2) the man cannot be blamed for his actions being that he is utterly dependent upon the woman because, "in this world," his gender as man has fated that he has no resistance to the "sway" of woman. Here again, the woman is held culpable for both herself and the man, because he is apparently the victim of an unalterable gendered destiny. Both options seek to vilify the woman and vindicate the man.

However, if we consider that both man and woman are created in the likeness of God, then previous models of faithfulness embodied by the woman suggest that man's very passivity and refusal/inability to take responsibility for discerning the nature of things for himself jeopardizes the fulfillment of the likeness of God in him. Attending to the good in creation and embracing it in a relationship of delight manifests the divine activity described in Genesis 1; however, insofar as the man does not seek to discern the nature of what the woman offers him, or what the serpent suggests (whether the man is present for the conversation remains ambiguous in the text), or the nature of the tree, he likewise will be unable to know his appropriate relationship to those features of reality, and miss the occasion to cultivate or confirm the image of the God in his being. Thus, Cassuto protects man by portraying him as (merely) the innocent/passive victim of woman's corrupted desire;¹⁹⁶ but in this "defense" of the man, Cassuto actually does a greater disservice to him.

An Immature Humanity

Genesis 3.7

¹⁹⁶ It will not be until later, in his commentary on 3.16, that Cassuto will identify the "corruption" in the woman to be mediated by her desire to influence the man.

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

In moving to Gen 3.7, Cassuto addresses the first outcome of humanity eating of the tree of knowledge: they come into the awareness that they are naked. However, he notes, there is no suggestion that any moral judgment has yet been exercised to indicate discernment between good and evil:

The verse does not say that they knew that it was not good to stand naked, or words to that effect, but simply that they knew the fact that they were naked...they were previously...not conscious of this fact (cf. Also iii 11:

Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?)... Hence there is not suggestion here of discernment, judgment or choice between good and evil, but of the objective awareness of all things...¹⁹⁷

Cassuto makes reference to a metaphor of children, whose innocence includes ignorance, which he likens to “small children who know naught of what exists around them,” pointing out parenthetically that “only after the object knowledge of things good and bad does the ability of the child develop to reject the bad and choose the good.” And so, Cassuto continues:

When [humanity] was created [we were] simple as a new-born child; and like a babe of a day, who receives food without any toil...as happy in the garden that...God had prepared...a garden that furnished [humanity] with all...life’s needs, without trouble or anxiety for the future.

Thus, according to patriarchy, Adam and Eve are expelled from Eden as punishment for their disobedience.¹⁹⁸ Yet, while the interpretation that humanity’s expulsion from Eden

¹⁹⁷ Cassuto, p.

¹⁹⁸ In his commentary on Genesis, Cassuto asserts that Gen 2.4-3:24 has, as its

is a divine condemnation of human wrong has undeniable currency for Christian theological traditions, has that always been the case from the earliest interpretations of Genesis 3? Cassuto's representation of the first man and woman as children has a much earlier predecessor in the interpretive work of Irenaeus (c. 130–202), bishop of Lyons, France.¹⁹⁹ Irenaeus, however, focuses on an interpretive nuance of a different order. He offers an alternative understanding of God's motivation to the judgment and punishment defended by Cassuto's read.

Making the fundamental consistency or "unity" of God as his theological starting point, Irenaeus argues that God's work, original to creation, is ongoing through the incarnation of the Christ. In Christ, the divine *logos* is incarnate, and through the life of Christ, humanity is redeemed through a restoration of its original divinity. Indeed, Irenaeus identifies Christ as the "Second Adam" who models a mature obedience, whereas the immature disobedience of the first Adam caused humanity's fall.²⁰⁰ Irenaeus' insistence that God authored creation becomes all the more significant in light of his assertion that God's plan originally intended a process of maturation for humanity. In this way, Adam and Eve,

primary purpose, to "explain how it is that in the Lord's word, the world of the good and beneficent God, evil should exist and [humanity] should endure pain and troubles and calamities," before going on to indicate that, "Apart from this primary teaching, it is also possible to draw, incidentally, other lessons from this section," among which is, "the law of Divine reward and punishment." *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 1: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1998), , 71.

¹⁹⁹ Then known as Lugdunum in Gaul

²⁰⁰ Known as "recapitulation," Irenaeus identifies the life of Christ as a process of divinization through which the incorruptible nature of the divine incorporates the once-corrupted nature of humanity, redeeming for humanity the divinity that was originally lost through the sin enacted by the impatience of Adam and Eve. Thus, radically distinct from any patriarchal tradition in Christian theology, Irenaeus' Christology does not locate the Slavonic moment in the crucifixion of Christ when, it is argued punishment for sin is said to be atoned for. Rather, Irenaeus argues it is the divine *logos* living every stage of human life without sin that redeems humanity from the immaturity that caused its "fall."

who are created as children with the immaturity of children, are destined nevertheless to grow into the divine likeness. In Eden, humanity's child-like desire to grow up with immediacy causes the first man and woman to act impatiently from ignorance.²⁰¹ Reframed by an Irenaean anthropology, Genesis 3 reads as an account of human failing in which the sin of Adam and Eve concerns impatience, ignorance and immaturity; in this way, Irenaeus introduces the theological option for understanding human immaturity as the theological problematic in the Edenic narrative.

But Cassuto foregoes this option, even while appropriating an anthropology that describes humanity as children; he does not imagine the logic apparent to Irenaeus in his interpretation of humanity's motives. Instead, Cassuto imputes to humanity the character of calculating rebellion ("slyness") presumably drawn from his understanding that the serpent, characterized by rebellious cunning, is in fact an allegory representing the "woman's cunning."²⁰² In his work on Genesis 3, the only discernable basis available for assigning humanity the character of rebellious cunning that he refers to as "slyness" is a prior instance of Cassuto employing the term "in the context of his eisogetical appropriation of the serpent's identity as the "slyness" of woman's cunning. But that characterization of the woman's "slyness" originates with Cassuto's eisogetical invention of the serpent's identity through a syncretistic blending: Cassuto puts an ancient Israelite mythical representation of the serpent as a rebellious creature together with a popular poetic formulation of the serpent as a symbol of evil to arrive at his understanding of the serpent as allegorical of the woman's cunning.²⁰³ But while Cassuto's characterization of the woman, via his description of the

²⁰¹ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/irenaeus-fragments.html>

²⁰² Cassuto, 142-147.

²⁰³ Cassuto initially offers a related discussion of sea monsters, beginning at the

serpent as the “slyness” of “woman’s cunning” offers the possibility of associating the same of humanity, this move is circuitously routed through rhetorical structure of an theological argument based on an isogetical presumption, rather than confirm or established by exegesis of the text’s description of humanity.

In fact, given that Cassuto makes clear that establishing humanity’s transgression as the meaning of the text is not supported by meanings original to the ancient texts that have informed the passage:

But to the heart of the story, that is, man’s transgression and punishment, there appears, according to our present knowledge, to be no parallel among the other oriental peoples...The conclusion of the author is that it is possible to discover in these texts only a few points of similarity to the Biblical narrative, *but not a parallel to [that] leading motif of the story.*²⁰⁴

Cassuto is emphatic that scholars, himself included, have failed to establish a connection between meanings original to the Ancient Near Eastern epics (which Cassuto draws upon in seeking the most original significances of particular elements in the ancient Hebraic scriptures) and the dominant interpretive hypothesis that Genesis 2.4-3.24 concerns “[humanity’s] transgression and punishment.” Cassuto acknowledges that another interpretive approach must be utilized to arrive as such a conclusion.²⁰⁵

middle of page 49 continuing to page 51, before launching into his specific findings on options for interpreting the serpent in Genesis 3 beginning at the bottom of pages 139, deductively screening suggestions offered by ancient near eastern myths, Talmudic teachings, ancient Israelite popular folk and poetic traditions, as well as the Torah, before offering his syncretistic interpretation on page 142. Cassuto, 49-51; 139-142.

²⁰⁴ Cassuto goes on to add, “The writer is likewise doubtful if the analogy is provided by the famous Babylonian seal on which are depicted a man and woman sitting on opposite sides of a tree, and a serpent behind the man...” Cassuto, 83-84.

²⁰⁵ As indicated earlier, “...that man corrupts [creation] by his conduct and brings evil into the world as a result of his corruption” is what Cassuto views to be the “primary teaching” of the Genesis 2.4-3.24 section. Cassuto, 71.

Since of his own admission Cassuto does not find in any ancient epic sources (for which the Eden narrative is an echo) interpretations corroborating antecedent affinities or suggestions for the Edenic narrative representing an ancient concern with the nature of human transgression or divine punishment, Cassuto determines that “the leading motif” of the Eden narrative addressing the issue of “Adam’s sin and punishment”²⁰⁶ can only be discerned in Genesis 3 through **intra-textual analyses** of themes in other passages utilizing similar phrases as those used to describe the events in Genesis 2.4-3.24. Therefore, it is in his rendering of the meaning for Genesis 2.9, for which he must first pull in conclusions drawn from other texts of scripture, that he is finally able to procure the substance of an interpretation that ascribes to the drama in Genesis 3 the description of a fall:

On the basis of this exposition, we are enabled to understand the response of the prohibition and the purport of the entire parable of Adam’s sin and punishment...

Out of fatherly love the Lord God forbade him to eat of the fruit, which would have opened before him the gateway to the knowledge of the world, the source of care and pain, and would have brought both his simplicity and his bliss to an end, *for in much wisdom is much vexation and he who increase knowledge increases sorrow (Eccles. i. 18)*. But man transgressed the prohibition, like a child who disobeys his father, who warns him for his own good, and thereby does harm to himself. He was not content with what was given to him and desired to obtain more. He did not wish to remain in the position of a child who is under the supervision of his father and is constantly dependent upon him; he wanted to learn by himself of the world around him; and to act independently on the basis of this knowledge; he aspired to become in knowledge, too, like God – a likeness that has, it is true, its glory...but also is danger, since man has insufficient means with which to overcome the difficulties and obstacles with which the external world confronts him.

Having transgressed the commands of his Creator, he was

²⁰⁶ Cassuto, 113.

deserving of punishment. This retribution, according to the established rule of the Bible, came upon him in a manner befitting his crime, and found experienced in the direct consequences of his disobedience. He was not content with the blissful life that he enjoyed in the garden of Eden, therefore he was banished from it; he wished to enlarge the boundaries set for him in the very good world that had emerged from the Father in heaven, hence he fell a prey to all the travails, perils, and misfortunes that lurk outside these boundaries; he wanted to know both the good and the evil, consequently he brought about the existence of evil in the world.²⁰⁷

Thus despite establishing the lack of precedence for an understanding that the “primary teaching” of the Genesis 2.4-3.24 section concerns how “man corrupts [creation] by his conduct and brings evil into the world as a result of his corruption,” Cassuto’s exegesis becomes representative of this admittedly unfounded innovation to the textual tradition. In making necessary inquiry into what his motivations for doing so might be, we are drawn further into his exegesis of the chapter.

Curses as Commensurate Punishment

Genesis 3.16 To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Cassuto confronts the reader with the title, "The Judgment and the Sentence" for the Genesis 3.8-21 section. His exegesis of the events that unfold in this section explicitly insists that the divine decrees represent judgments intended to punish; however, such punishment is intended to be for humanity’s own good:

²⁰⁷ Cassuto, 113-114.

The decrees pronounced by the Lord God mentioned here are not exclusively punishments; they are also, and chiefly, measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation.²⁰⁸

We will return to consider this declaration later. Although Cassuto falls just short of making explicit the profane suggestion that women's pain and suffering in childbearing has any part in God's salvific design, he unapologetically establishes the significance of pain and suffering in childbearing as a punishment brought down on all women as a consequence of the first woman's failing, which caused humanity to forfeit an immortal existence. Assigning to woman's reproductive capacity the stigma of punishment, Cassuto insists that reproductive pain and suffering are specifically designed to be God's

...punishment for [the woman's] transgression, as it is written: I will greatly multiply your suffering, especially in your child-bearing: in pain you shall bring forth children, and that, ultimately is what matters most.²⁰⁹

In other words, according to Cassuto,

“Particularly during the period of childbearing women would suffer from increasing weakness and would need special attention, and when the time of parturition arrived, they would inevitably endure the most fearful pangs: in pain you shall bring forth children.”²¹⁰

In the following verse, “Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you” (Gen 3.16), Cassuto suggests that God metes out to the woman a punishment befitting her crime. “Measure for measure,” he begins, prescribing that the woman will experience her husband as having authority as a consequence of her apparent efforts to wield influence over him: “...you influenced your husband and caused him to do what you

²⁰⁸ Cassuto, 163.

²⁰⁹ Cassuto, 163.

²¹⁰ Cassuto, 165.

wished; henceforth, you and your female descendents will be subservient to your husbands. You will yearn for them, but they will be the heads of the families, and will rule over you.”²¹¹

In his remarks here Cassuto references his comments on Genesis 2.24, in which he interprets the meaning of the words *A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife* to explain how an explicitly patriarchal social structure replaced a previously practiced system of matriarchy.

...in the epoch of the Torah this system had long disappeared, and in the words that occur later on in our section, *and he shall rule over you (3.16)*, suffice to show that, according to the narrative before us, it is the man who is deemed the family head.²¹²

For Cassuto 3.16 reiterates God’s intention that divine as vindicating the practice of controlling women through their subservience to men as a response to what he interprets to be the first woman’s attempt to influence her husband. There are, of course, several obvious problems with this interpretation. Even from within his own paradigm, using the expression, “measure for measure,” suggests that the response is somehow commensurate to the violation. Yet without indicating which violation (Cassuto assigns to the woman many) he imitates the Augustinian leap of reasoning utilized in the doctrine of “original sin,” to mandate that that the violation of the woman mysteriously multiplies and justifies a form of punishment that legislates the subordination of all women for all time – with divine sanction no less. Here, his perception of the punishment can only be described as a profoundly disproportional, even hysterical, reaction to the one time action of one woman.

Second, contrary to Cassuto’s suggestion, it is *not* clear from the text that the woman’s intent was to influence the man; the text offers no comments on the woman’s

²¹¹ Cassuto, 165.

²¹² Cassuto, 137.

motives for giving the fruit to the man, nor for that matter, on the man's for eating it upon receiving it from the woman. We are simply told that the woman gave the fruit to the man, who was with her. It becomes a matter of interpretation to infer the motivation of the woman, just as it must be to infer the motivation of the man. But given that the text makes explicit that the man was with the woman, and given that the woman had discerned the fruit to have a compelling and manifold goodness, Cassuto foregoes his customary thoroughness in eliminating alternative expository possibilities here, and assumes, without question, that the woman shares from a desire to "influence" her husband. Furthermore, it is clear from the context that his use of "influence" is not neutral. His condemnation of the woman, combined with the noticeably opposite lack of judgmentalism towards the man (inconsistent with his tone and condemnations of the woman) indicate his clear sympathy lies with the man:

And she also gave some to her husband with her and he ate. Here, too, we have extreme brevity, and this terseness likewise betokens the celerity with which the deed was performed. In regard to the man, the Bible does not state his motives for eating, as in the case of the woman, since of him it suffices that she is the one who gives him the fruit. It is the way of the world for the man to be easily swayed by the woman.²¹³

The man can do no more than affirm to God that the woman gave him the fruit; he ate of his own accord. And God says to the woman, "You will yearn for them, but they will be heads of the families, and will rule over you." With this "punishment" deemed appropriate to the woman's violation, Cassuto's interpretation models the patriarchal preoccupation to condone the subordination of women to men on the basis that such subordination not only has pedagogical value, but is divinely sanctioned.

²¹³ Cassuto, 148.

Genesis 3.17

And to Adam He said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,

And have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you saying: "You shall not eat of it," cursed is the ground because of you; in suffering you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

Genesis 3.18

thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the grain of the field.

Genesis 3.19

In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return.'

While unwilling, or perhaps unable, Cassuto does not abandon the implication that humanity's transgression is a violation sufficient troubling that humanity must be expelled from Eden. Yet, concerned to honor his original intent to offer an interpretation of God's love, he softens the description of God's response to humanity, suggesting that "the decrees pronounced by the Lord God...are not exclusively *punishments*; they are also, and chiefly, *measures taken for the good of the human species* in its new situation."²¹⁴ Since man chose the knowledge of good and evil, which involves mortality, preferring it to primitive simplicity, which is linked to eternal life, the Lord God acted towards him as a human father would his dearly beloved little son, who did something contrary to his counsel, and thereby brought great harm upon himself. On the one hand, the father rebukes the son for not having followed his advice, and on the other hand, he endeavors to remedy the hurt that the son has

²¹⁴ Cassuto, 163.

done to himself by his action. The decrees pronounced by the Lord God mentioned here are not exclusively punishments; they are also, and chiefly, measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation.²¹⁵

Expulsion as Protective Punishment

Genesis 3.22

Then the LORD God said, "See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"

23 therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

24 He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

In moving to 3.22-24, we are permitted to eavesdrop on divine deliberations about the event; however, even here, it has not yet come to light why humanity's capacity to know good and evil generates such concern and dilemma for the divine. In Cassuto's exegesis, he resorts to historical precedence involving the angels. He issues the reminder, "We have already seen that the idea prevailed among Israelites that the knowledge of good and evil, that is of everything in the world, was one of the specific attributes of angels" in order to establish that, likewise, in the declaration that humanity has become "like us" resides the implication of an inappropriate breach of boundaries.

Therefore, Cassuto extrapolates, in the divine acknowledging that humanity has "become like us," it indicts humanity for aspiring above its station to be "like one of my entourage, like one of the Divine entities, which are of a higher order than man, for example

²¹⁵ Cassuto, 162-163.

cherubim and their kind.”²¹⁶ Cassuto concludes: at the core of what qualifies humanity’s decision as transgression was a breaching of the boundary between human and divine. Yet, even as he seeks to further the argument that humanity’s aspirations transgress, Cassuto is unable to point to anything more virulent or clear to concur or endorse the suggestion of transgression. Interestingly, in his commentary on 3.22 and the significance of humanity “knowing good and evil,” he is unable to establish any clearer condemnation of transgression than to infer it from his own interpretation and identification of a related breach of an indirect, conditional instructive:

The man had been given permission to eat of the tree of life on the condition we noted earlier that he would eschew the fruit of the tree of the knowledge.²¹⁷

The strongest inference for transgression Cassuto can construct involves the suggestion of a violation (eating of the tree of life) or a prohibition he must extrapolate:

The meaning of the verse is apparently this: had man remained in his state of simplicity, he could have attained even to immortality, but on account of his disobedience, the Lord God decreed that he should not be able to achieve this state; hence He forbade him then to eat of the tree of life, and expelled him from the garden of Eden, so that he should not transgress this second prohibition even as he had transgressed the first.²¹⁸

Therefore, protective measures must be taken: “Since this condition had not been fulfilled, it was necessary to take heed lest, he eat also of the tree of life.”²¹⁹ According to the text, the only information we are made privy to in this last passage is that there is a Divine troubling over the necessity of preventing humanity from eating of the tree of life.

²¹⁶ Cassuto, 172.

²¹⁷ Cassuto, 124.

²¹⁸ Cassuto, 124-123.

²¹⁹ Cassuto, 173.

But we are not told why. On this small but significant fact hinges the vindication of Cassuto's interpretation of this seminal chapter. Minimally, indicating that the decision to exile humanity is only informed by a concern to prevent access to the Tree of Life, the coherence of Cassuto's interpretation remains frustrated by the fact that the text itself lacks anything suggestive of divine jealousy or righteous indignation suggesting God is concerned to prevent humanity's access to the tree of life for purposes of punishment or condemnation for a prior transgression.²²⁰

The text's silence on why God seeks to prevent humanity's access to the tree of life presents a profound challenge to the truth of Cassuto's interpretive paradigm – and indeed all efforts to interpret Genesis 3 as account of humanity's fall. In that he fundamentally assumes a correlation exists between the divine concern to prevent access to the tree of life, humanity's exile from Eden, and humanity's act in eating of the tree of knowledge, without establishing that God is motivated to prevent humanity from aspiring to greater god-likeness, Cassuto cannot further his argument that humanity's exile from Eden is a protective measure against the ambitious violations of a prideful humanity. Yet, while describing humanity as bent by rebellious desire to transgress the appropriate boundaries between human and divine, there is slim textual evidence to support Cassuto's suggestion that humanity's exile derives from a divine jealousy, or a righteous desire that motivates God to erect a protective barrier against humanity's transgressive hubris..

If desire to punish is eliminated as a possible motive in God's decision to expel humanity from Eden, what remains in the text that might suggest a divine motive? What alternatives can be found for understanding God's intentions in requiring humanity to leave

²²⁰ Cassuto, 172-174.

Eden, and even guarding the path to its return with a threat? Interpreting humanity's expulsion as a matter of divine punishment introduces a troubling incongruity that is not accounted for in the text of Genesis 3: how does the undiluted divine benevolence characteristic of God's disposition in the previous two chapters abruptly dissipate? The text gives no accounting of the cause as is seen to be the case in subsequent passages where human action is identified as the cause of a divine response of anger or punishment. Such interpretations necessarily require the divine benevolence highlighted throughout preceding chapters to be replaced by an understanding of God as judgment-oriented with a punitive disposition.

Beyond the discovery of humanity's decision, God's tenderness towards humanity persists -- highlighted by God's concern to replace humanity's inadequate fig-wear with more protective animal skins.²²¹

However, Cassuto's interpretation of the last verse in the chapter suggests that a disturbingly punitive disposition has overtaken divine benevolence: "God did not just *send him forth*, an act that would not have precluded all possibility of his returning, but *He drove him out* -- completely."²²² Cassuto concludes:

At first the man [humanity] dwelt in the midst of the garden, in the vicinity of the tree of life, and he could at any moment approach it and eat of its fruit; now he is far from there, and the cherubim and the sword-flame guard the way and prevent him from again drawing near to the garden and to the tree of life. The bliss that he was privileged to enjoy in the garden of

²²¹ *And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife tunics of skins, and clothed them (3:21)* For Cassuto, God's provision of "tunics made of skins...enduring tunics in contrast to aprons of leaves (v.7) which do not last a long time," is among what he describes as those "measures taken for the good of the human species in its new situation..." to help protect humanity "on account of the cold and all the other natural phenomena that are injurious to human beings." Cassuto, 163, 171.

²²² Cassuto, 173.

Eden passed away irretrievably, like a vanished dream. From now on, the human race will live only amidst the hardships and afflictions of the world below.²²³

Cassuto's work on Genesis 3 thus ends, intoning a sense of the irretrievable loss incurred by humanity's transgression. The new reality humanity is destined to face, replete with hardships and affliction, is the result of a punitively necessary departure from the provision and security of Eden. Having seen how Augustine and Cassuto interpret Genesis 3 as a story of humanity's disobedience and fall, in subsequent chapters we will examine how alternative exegetical meanings are drawn from the exegesis and interpretations offered by Phyllis Tribble and H. G. Mitchell. Cassuto's interpretation, questions remain about the viability of his eisoptical suggestion that the serpent is merely an allegory for the woman's cunning, as well as the theological justice of his suggestion that the text offers sufficient evidence of violation and sin to indict the serpent, humanity, and the ground as deserving of punishment – however pedagogical.

²²³ Cassuto, 177.

Appendix C
Phyllis Tribble:
Depatriarchalizing Gender in Eden

According to traditional interpretations, the narrative in Genesis 2:7-3:24...proclaims male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. It portrays woman as “temptress” and troublemaker who is dependent upon and dominated by her husband. Over the centuries, this misogynous reading has acquired a status of canonicity so that those who deplore and those who applaud the story both agree upon its meaning.²²⁴

With these words, Tribble introduces the misogyny lodged at the core of “traditional interpretations” of Genesis 2-3. Dominated by a patriarchal imagination, such traditional interpretations not only assert a problematic inferiority of woman, but also make the profoundly troubling claim that an androcentric system of male domination is a social paradigm sanctioned by nothing less than divine mandate.²²⁵ Offering a “partial list of specifics documenting the consensus,” Tribble shows how elements in Genesis 2 and 3 are utilized to generate the interpretive logic that endorses the inferiority of women as correlative to a biblical ideology proclaiming the superiority and domination of men:

“[1] A male God creates the first man (2:7) and later woman (2:22); first means superior and last means inferior or subordinate.

[2] Woman is created for the sake of man: a helpmate to cure his loneliness (2:18-23).

²²⁴ Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 73 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

²²⁵ Tribble levels her indictment against the patriarchal imagination for violating the rhetorical integrity of the narrative: “As ideas supposedly drawn out of the narrative, they fail to respect the integrity of this work as an interlocking structure of words and motifs with its own intrinsic value and meaning. In short, these ideas violate the rhetoric of the story.” Tribble, 73.

[3] Contrary to nature, woman comes out of man; she is denied even her natural function of birthing that function is given to man (2:21-22).

[4] Woman is the rib of man, dependent upon him for life (2:21-22).

[5] Taken out of man (2:23), woman has a derivative, not an autonomous, existence.

[6] Man names woman (2:23) and thus has power over her.

[7] Man leaves his father's family in order to set up through his wife another patriarchal unit. (2:24).

[8] Woman is tempted by man to disobey and thus she is responsible for sin in the world (3:6); she is untrustworthy, gullible, and simpleminded.

[9] Woman is cursed by pain in childbirth (3:16) pain in childbirth is a more severe punishment than man's struggles with the soil; it signifies that woman's sin is greater than man's.

[10] Woman's desire for man (3:16) is God's way of keeping her faithful and submissive to her husband.

[11] God gives man the right to rule over woman (3:16).²²⁶

Trible's summary of the tenets basic to patriarchal renderings of Genesis 2-3 gives particular attention to the Eden narrative. Through these tenets, the logic of patriarchy moves beyond arguing for the inferiority of woman and ambitiously reads Genesis 3 as a divine endorsement of the subordination of woman to man. It is thus, Trible recognizes, that the machinations of a patriarchal imagination have successfully retained a totalitarian-like dominance over meanings of the passage. Yet still more egregious, Trible grimly notes, is the absence of viable alternatives that have left even the most ardent critics powerless to resist conceding to Genesis 3 the very (androcentric and misogynistic) meanings deplored.

²²⁶ Trible, 73.

God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality is Tribble's singular battle cry against the looming Goliath of patriarchal anthropologies. Loathed to tolerate yet another generation of gender fallacy parading as orthodox anthropology, Tribble takes her stance against the bullying logic of patriarchal misogyny guided by a feminist hermeneutic of suspicion.

The well-chosen stone shot through the methodological slingshot of her incisive literary analysis is a new rhetorical analysis of Genesis 2-3. Concentrating "...primarily on the text rather than on extrinsic factors such as historical background, archeological data, compositional history, authorial intentional, sociological setting, or theological motivation and result," the literary analysis allows her to examine the connections inherent in the form and content of the passage's language, and discern what logic and artistry are organic to the story.²²⁷ Tribble's analysis establishes how "...the stylistic and rhetorical features of the [Hebrew] language illuminate its interpretations,"²²⁸ thus setting the scope of meanings possible for a passage and clarifying the criteria by which other meanings assigned can be determined intrinsically viable or extrinsically inviolate. These strengths of rhetorical analysis prove ideal when assessing the merits of the exegetical logic employed by patriarchal interpretations to validate their most fundamental claims about the meaning of Genesis 3.

In Tribble's fourth chapter, "A Love Story Gone Awry," she addresses interpretations of Genesis 2 and 3. Of particular interest are 1) the arguments she offers to refute claims that woman's nature is inferior, derivative and, by nature of such an existence, rightly subordinated to man; and 2) her work on the distinctions made of prophetic judgments as prescriptive mandates versus descriptive proclamations, especially where they pertain to

²²⁷ According to Tribble, "To be sure, these external concerns supplement one's understanding so that the critic never divorces herself or himself from them; yet at the same time stress falls upon interpreting the literature in terms of itself." Tribble, 8.

²²⁸ Tribble, xvii.

Genesis 3:14-19. Tribble's work incisively exposes the cancerous growth of rhetorical fallacies that have infested the organ of Genesis 2-3 like a malignant tumor.²²⁹ Where patriarchal interpretations argue that order of creation denotes man's superiority – "[1] A male God creates the first man (2:7) and later woman (2:22) – first means superior and last means inferior or subordinate."²³⁰ Her rhetorical analysis of the order of creation yields an embarrassingly necessary corrective to flawed patriarchal logic. If, indeed, created order is a marker of creaturely quality, then the logic of progression reveals man, in his role as predecessor to woman, to be the penultimate expression of creation, and renders woman, in her role as the final expression of God's creation, as representation of something akin to the crowning glory of God's creative expression. Woman therefore becomes "...the culmination of creation, fulfilling humanity in sexuality.... Equal in creation with the man, she is...elevated in emphasis by the design of the story."²³¹

Yet Tribble is well aware that deconstructive critique alone will not suffice to recover the rhetorical integrity of Genesis 2–3. For this reason, she invests with great intention in the work of exegetical recovery. Guided by a feminist vision concerned with recovering the wealth of insights ignored or misunderstood by patriarchal exegetical traditions, Tribble is able

²²⁹ The primary value of rhetorical analysis for Tribble resides in how form reveals content: "The organic unity of the text is a related emphasis. Form and content are inseparable." For instance, order in sentence structure contributes to the signification of woman as being endowed with representing the epitome of God's creative work. Tribble, 109.

²³⁰ Tribble, 73.

²³¹ Tribble, 102. Elsewhere, Tribble adds, "Genesis 1 itself supports this interpretation, for there, male and female are indeed the last and truly the crown of all creatures." She offers the supporting logic, "The last is also first where beginnings and endings are parallel. In Hebrew literature, the central concerns of a unit often appear at the beginning and the end as an *inclusio* device." For this last point, she references, among others, James Muilenburg's "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, March, 1969, 9f. Phyllis Tribble, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 41, No. 1. (March, 1973), 30-48.

to illumine a reality of equality and mutuality embedded in the gendered relations of Genesis 2-3.

'adham

According to Tribble, “Ambiguity characterizes the meaning of *'adham* in Genesis 2-3. On the one hand, man is the first creature formed (2:7). The Lord God puts him in the garden “to till it and keep it,” a job identified with the male (cf. 3:17-19). On the other hand, *'adham* is the generic term for humankind. In commanding *'adham* not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the Deity is speaking to both the man and the woman (2:16-17). Until the differentiation of the female and male (2:21-23), *'adham* is basically androgynous: one creature incorporating two sexes.”²³² Her point in this statement is first to establish that in the first mention of *'ha- 'adama* in Genesis 2:7, there is “no sexuality” assumed. Rather, there is a genderless “earth creature,”²³³ who lacks any sexual differentiation (that follows in Genesis 2:21-23, or what Tribble identifies as the fourth episode). This is important to Tribble because it allows her to refute long-standing claims of patriarchal interpretations²³⁴ that “allege female subordination based on this order of events.” Whereas Genesis 1:27, representing the Priestly source, shows “God creates *'adham* as male and female in one act,” the Yahwist author of Genesis 2:7 appears to have made woman a

²³² Phyllis Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation,” in *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 41, No.1 (March, 1973), 35.

²³³ “In other words, the earth creature is not the male; it is not the first man.” Although the word *'ha- 'adama* acquires ambiguous usages and meanings – including an exclusively male reference – in the development of the story, those ambiguities are not present in the first episode.” Tribble, 80.

²³⁴ Tribble references E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, p172f; S. H. Hooke, “Genesis,” *Peake’s Commentary on the Bible*, London: Thomas Nelson, 1962, 179.

second, or subordinate, inferior sex,” by presenting man first.²³⁵ However, asserting the literary and theological maxim, “The last may be first,” Tribble argues instead that the significance of gender, created last in creation, suggests that, “the Yahwist account moves to its climax, not in its decline, in the creation of woman. She is not an afterthought, she is the culmination.”²³⁶

Expanding on her commentary on the genderless earth creature, Tribble remarks that, in the text prior to the woman’s creation, “The creature’s relationship to the rest of creation is ambiguous: a part of and yet apart from; of common ground but with power over; joined yet separated.”²³⁷ This allows her to sensitize us to the particular point that a desire for companionship appropriate to the nature of ‘adham inspires the creation of woman: “Since the creature is not only of the earth but also other than the earth, it needs fulfillment form that which is other than in the earth. This need Yahweh God recognizes: ‘I will make a companion corresponding to it.’”²³⁸ The importance of this point is underscored elsewhere by Tribble with the elaboration, “The context for the advent of woman is a divine judgment, ‘It is not good that Adam should be alone; I will make a helper fit for him.’” (2:18)²³⁹

²³⁵Tribble offers comments on the former by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and comments on the latter understanding by Eugene H. Maly.

Stanton observed that in Genesis 1:26-28 “dignifies woman as an important factor in the creation, equal in power and glory with man,” while Genesis 2 “makes her a mere afterthought.” *The Woman’s Bible*, Part 1, New York: European Publishing Company, 1895, 20. Sheila D. Collins, “Towards a Feminist Theology,” *The Christian Century*, August 2, 1972, 798.

“But woman’s existence, psychologically and in the social order, is dependent on man.” Eugene H. Maly. “Genesis,” *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Hills: Prentice Hall, 1968 12:

²³⁶ Tribble, “Depatriarchalizing,” 36.

²³⁷ Tribble, 90.

²³⁸ Tribble, 90.

²³⁹ Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” for Religion 103 Andover Newton Theological School (1973).

‘ezer

In her work on *‘ezer* – commonly translated “helper” or “helpmate,” in Genesis 2:18 – Tribble introduces a watershed exegetical re/discovery destined to trans/form biblical critique and the deconstruction of patriarchal interpretations for generations to come. Her research uncovers an exegetical corrective to the patriarchal assumption previously identified by Tribble, that “[2] Woman is created for the sake of man: a helpmate to cure his loneliness (2:18-23).”²⁴⁰ She begins by explaining, “The Hebrew word for *‘ezer*, rendered here as “companion,” has been traditionally translated “helper” – a translation that is totally misleading because the English word helper suggests an assistant, a subordinate, indeed, an inferior, while the Hebrew word *‘ezer* carries no such connotation.”²⁴¹ Thus, where patriarchal interpretations are prone to suggest that the woman, as “helpmate,” or “helper,” occupies a lesser stature or subordinate position to the man she was created to assist, Tribble reveals through a study of contexts in usage that *‘ezer* is frequently used to describe a stronger helping to deliver one in need, “To the contrary, in the Hebrew scriptures this word often describes God as the superior who creates and saves Israel.”²⁴²

Moreover, with the modification of “the accompanying phrase, ‘corresponding to it’ (*kenegdo*),” Tribble indicates that the term *‘ezer* is further transformed to connote “superiority to specify identity, mutuality and equality.” Highlighting the significance of the transformation effected by such an exegetical recovery, Tribble elucidates, “According to Yahweh God, what the earth creature needs is a companion, one who is neither subordinate

²⁴⁰ Tribble, 73.

²⁴¹ Tribble, 90.

²⁴² Tribble, 90.

nor superior; one who alleviates isolation through identity.”²⁴³ In such ways, Tribble’s careful attention to the matters of syntax establishes that a gender mutuality lies at the core of how the divine conceptualizes the relationship between man and woman.

‘issab

Tribble’s examination of the act of man (*‘isb*) in calling his companion “woman” (*‘issab*) suggests that it reveals the absence of any of the associations with dominance and power over woman that patriarchal interpretations suggest. Tribble’s point is that the significance of the term used describes the difference in sexuality introduced by the use of the complementary terms in Genesis 2: “The word woman (*‘issab*) demonstrates further that the issue is not the naming of the female, but rather the recognition of sexuality.”²⁴⁴ She strengthens her point, “*Issab* itself is not a name; it is a common noun, not a proper noun. It designates gender; it does not specify person.”²⁴⁵

²⁴³ Tribble, 90.

²⁴⁴ Tribble, 100.

²⁴⁵ Tribble, 100. This aspect of Tribble’s argument has been disputed on the point that it is assumed the naming of the animals was also done taxonomically, according to type or species – and therefore very much in line with Tribble’s suggestion that *‘issab* denotes gender as type of species, rather than an individual person. If that is indeed the case, it would appear that Tribble manages to offer the syntactic argument that gives merit to her critics.

However, according to a review of the five contexts (Gn 2.20 26.18 Is 65.15 Ps 147.4 Ru 4.17a) identified by HALOT as containing the particular phrase קָרָא שֵׁם לְ a. לְ meaning, “to name a name for,” or “**give someone a name**” associated with **קָרָא-י** reveals that particular or individual proper names are referenced to by the noun “name.” In Gen 26.18, Isaac is described as using the same [proper] names for wells, as was used by his father; Is 65.15 refers to a name that will be used as curse in the context of another [particular] name that will be given the people of God; Ps. 147.4 describes God as numbering all the stars before giving to [each] of them their [specific] names; Ru 4.17 describes the naming of Obed as carrying the meaning, “a son has been given to Naomi.” Likewise, in Gn 3.20, when the woman is given the name “Eve,” the related phrase —c. קָרָא שֵׁם לְ suggests a proper name is assigned, “to declare her name such and such.” In other words, as the phrase used קָרָא שֵׁם לְ connotes the giving of specific proper names to the animals (even when the particular name

Thus, though he has been authorized to name the animals, Tribble shows that, in the absence of the verb 'name' to describe the man's activity in identifying of his companion as *'issab*, "the man is not establishing power over her but rejoicing in their mutuality."²⁴⁶ She further argues, "Moreover, this word appears in the story before the earth creature 'calls' it: the narrator reports that 'Yahweh God built the rib which he took from the earth creature

is not given, a specific name is being referenced) and Eve, whereas *בְּרִיאָה* makes reference only to a general naming, it nevertheless appears that initial assertion in Tribble's argument is defensible: the calling of the woman *'issab* is not like the same naming that is undergone by the animals.

Moreover, when the name "Eve" is given to the woman, as in the other instances of the phrase's use, the underlying dynamic is one of discerning or revealing the truth or original nature of the thing named, not necessarily the assertion of dominance or power over: Gen 26.18 Isaac recovers the true or original names of the wells, reclaiming their power to supply water after they had been sabotaged by the Philistines; Is 65.15 indicates that the truth of the name's association with curse will be exposed through the renaming; Ps 147.4 God's numbering is process counting, giving an account for each and every star counted, so that the following description of all the stars being named, suggests the significance of an appointing or each single star's name being known individually (this nuance of each star's significance is repeated in *Isa 40.26* where YHWH is described as "calling them [the host] all by name"...emphasizing that "not one is missing"); Ru 4.17 the truth of Obed's identity as a son accounted to Naomi is given as the intended or original meaning of the name. In each of these verses, the phrase is used to emphasize how the truth of the identity or original identity is made manifest in the naming process, rather than domination by authorship of the name. Therefore the original foundation of Tribble's argument can be modified to recognize that in the first use of the term *'issab* is distinctive from the effort to name of the animals and later Eve, in that no proper name is assigned the woman. Subsequently, in the naming of Eve the phrase describing the naming the connotation of the phrase should not be distorted to suggest a naming biased with unassociated theme domination or subordination of the one being named by the one naming. Rather, translations should recognize that the contextual usage of nuances the importance of recovering or establishing the original nature or true /accurate value of the one being named.

²⁴⁶ "Although this naming formula appears in episode three of our story to signify the power of the earth creature over the animals, it does not occur in episode four. The earth creature exclaims, "This shall be called *'issah*.'" Tribble, 100. Tribble has received notable critique on this argument. The core objection is that the man is identifying the animals taxonomically, according to species, and not assigning proper names such that when the woman is identified according to species, i.e. she is *'issab*, it is very much in line with how the other creatures are named. Of course, there is no certainty offered by the text that the animals are identified taxonomically, but it appears all but universally assumed, but Tribble as well as her critiques, that the animals are being taxonomically assigned species titles rather than personal names.

into a woman [*'issab*]' (2:22). Thus, the creatures poem does not determine who the woman is, but rather delights in what God has already done in creating sexuality: Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This shall be called *'issab* because from *'ish* was taken this."²⁴⁷

Among the gifts Tribble's exegetical work imparts in this is a recovery of the keen sense of delight experienced by the man as he encounters a companion akin to himself. This is a dimension of *eros* – of the experience of God's creative life-giving work – that Tribble's interpretation enables us to recognize as having been undermined, if not ignored, in traditional interpretations. Indeed, where traditional renderings mistranslate the moment of man's excitement at recognizing woman's compatibility with him and suggest he is merely exercising his naming responsibilities and asserting his "dominion" over creation, they tragically strip this first encounter of the delight and appreciation consistent with encountering the abundant and creative goodness of God's provision. The patriarchal imagination deprives the man of the profound importance of having his only identified lack filled by the provision of a companion that completes him.

Having recovered the meaning of *'ezer* to establish that Yahweh God's intention is to alleviate man's loneliness by providing one he can relate to as a companion, Tribble now resignifies the meaning of *'issab* to free humanity to rejoice in their mutuality, their shared likeness. *'ish* is no longer alone and is expressing awareness, a delighted awareness, that he has, indeed, one like himself to experience companionship with. He is *'ish* and she *'issab*.²⁴⁸

Our final attention to Tribble's work concerns her understanding of divine judgment in Genesis 3:14-19, because an appreciation of her work in restoring evidence of woman's

²⁴⁷ Tribble, 100.

²⁴⁸ "The noun *name* is strikingly absent from the poetry. Hence, in calling the woman, the man is not establishing power over her but rejoicing in their mutuality." Tribble, 100.

agency and responsibility to Genesis 2-3 would be incomplete without it. Tribble begins her comments on the judgment passages of Genesis 3:14-19 by making the dubious distinction that, “Through the tempter (the serpent) is cursed, the man and the woman are not. They are judged, and the judgments are commentary on the disastrous effects of their shared disobedience.” The currency of her interpretation here lies in the argument she makes for understanding divine judgment not as “prescriptive mandate,” but as descriptive declaration.²⁴⁹ By this, Tribble means that, while these passages “...show how terrible human life has become, as it stands between creation and grace,” they nevertheless do not prescribe the change in reality, as if to suggest divine causality, but only confirm it through divine description.²⁵⁰ The significance in this distinction lies in Tribble's argument that, in these divine judgments, God is actually protesting the changes that humanity's disobedience has wrought, not condoning them.

...this judgment process shows the disintegration that results when limits are exceeded. The divine speeches to the serpent, to the woman, and the man are not commands for structuring life. To the contrary, they show how intolerable life existence as become as it stands between creation and redemption.²⁵¹

By establishing these verses as descriptions of the consequences, Tribble seeks to steer the interpretation away from patriarchal claims that judgment proclaims punishment, “They witness to living death, not to fulfilled life, and this witness is a protest, indeed a condemnation, against the contamination of creation.”²⁵² She attempts this by engaging an

²⁴⁹ Tribble, 36.

²⁵⁰ “We misread if we assume that these judgments are mandates. They describe; they do not prescribe. They protest; they do not condone.” Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” for Religion 103 Andover Newton Theological School (1973).

²⁵¹ Tribble, p. 123.

²⁵² “These judgments describe consequences; they do not prescribe punishment

argument based on rhetorical necessity: the verses must be instances of divine condemnation of the realities they describe, *because* the alternative is that God is forced to advocate the injustices of subjugation and supremacy which stand in opposition to biblical claims that upholding justice is central to the character and concerns of God. She offers Genesis 3:16 as her prime example, “Of special concern are the words telling the woman that her husband shall rule over her. This statement is not licensed for male supremacy, but rather it is condemnation of that very pattern.” Because “subjugation and supremacy are perversions of creation,”²⁵³ she defends the argument that the obvious meanings of the text must, of necessity, represent condemnations of the very things described – otherwise they violate the character of justice that has been overwhelmingly established to be a fundamental dimension of the divine.

Thus, “Rather than legitimating the patriarchal culture from which it comes, the myth places that culture under judgment. And thus it functions to liberate – not to enslave. This function we can recover and appropriate.”²⁵⁴ With inspired logic, Tribble rises to the challenge of freeing a text ultimately mired in a logic of patriarchal misogyny, which interprets Genesis 3:6 as representing the very reality of a sinful cultural paradigm condemned by the divine judgment represented in those passages. Arguing that what the patriarchal readings describe is not only condemned by the divine, Tribble offers Genesis 3:14-19 as a clarion call of truth inviting redemptive transformation.

What becomes novel in Tribble’s argument for woman’s equality is how she utilizes

(that comes later in the scene)”Tribble, 123.

²⁵³ Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” for Religion 103 Andover Newton Theological School (1973).

²⁵⁴ Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” for Religion 103 Andover Newton Theological School (1973).

the condemnation of woman's disobedience as further evidence of woman's agency and responsibility. Tribble does not seek to rescue woman from her participation in the event of humanity's fall, nor does she protect woman from the consequences of her disobedience:

Through disobedience, the woman has become slave. Her initiative and her freedom vanish. The man is corrupted also. For he has become master, ruling over the one who is his god-given equal. The subordination of female to male signifies their shared sin. It is a sin in which they participate – this is up and against the argument that the inferiority of the female justifies subordination and indicts the essential participation of the man in this paradigm.²⁵⁵

The same follows with her interpretation of the woman's decision in Genesis 3:6, when Tribble acknowledges:

The initiative and the decision are hers alone. There is no consultation with her husband. She neither seeks his advice, nor his permission. She acts independently...she has interpreted [the prohibition] and now she struggles with the temptation to disobey.²⁵⁶

Tribble recognizes that, for woman's capacities, independence and agency in decision-making to be affirmed, she must be allowed to receive the condemnation merited by her exercising the same in violation of divine command. Such an interpretation seems the most viable option for preserving the truth of woman's intelligence, independence, agency and responsibility. Woman's disobedience, in other words, for Tribble, implies proof of woman's capacity for obedience. Thus, Tribble announces that woman and man alike inherit the consequences of their various forms of disobedience:

This sin vitiates all relationships...between animals and human beings (3:15); mothers and children (3:16); husbands and wives (3:16); man and the soil (3:17); man and his work

²⁵⁵ Tribble, "Depatriarchizing," 41.

²⁵⁶ Tribble, "Depatriarchizing," 40.

(3:19). Whereas in creation man and woman know harmony and equality in sin they know alienation and discord.

Trible reasserts her earlier objections to the violation of divine design represented in man naming woman, as though she were one of the animals he is given dominion over. She points out how the statement, “At this place of sin and judgment ‘the man calls his wife’s name Eve’” (3:20) occurs in the context of fallenness, therefore reflecting a sinful act as well as precipitating a sinful state of domination, and “thereby asserting his rule over her. The naming itself faults the man for corrupting a relationship of mutuality and equality.”

Confronting the undistorted reality of patriarchal sexism in the text, Tribble redeems the function of Genesis 2-3, not as that which condemns women and men to suffer in the throes of the gender paradigms described, but as an instance of divinely described truth calling forth redemptive resistance by all, regardless of gender. She explains, “The Yahwist narrative tells us who we are (creatures of equality and mutuality); it tells us who we have become (creatures of oppression); and so it opens possibilities for change, for a return to our true liberation under God. In other words, the story calls for female and male to repent,”²⁵⁷ leading Tribble to interpret humanity’s exile from Eden as fitting punishment for an undeniably errant humanity: “And so Jahweh evicts the primeval couple from the garden...”²⁵⁸

Counter to patriarchy’s penchant for hierarchical structures in social relations, Tribble reads Genesis 2-3 theologically informed by feminism’s egalitarian vision for gender relationships. Her intrinsic exegesis of the language reveals patriarchy’s ideological convictions to be extrinsic to the meaning embedded in the form and context of the

²⁵⁷ Phyllis Tribble, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread” for Religion 103 Andover Newton Theological School (1973).

²⁵⁸ Tribble, “Depatriarchizing,” 41.

narrative.²⁵⁹ With the idolatrous self-aggrandizement inherent in patriarchal anthropologies exposed, it becomes possible, and all the more necessary, to explore what meanings remain to be discovered within Genesis 2 – 3, beyond the realm of patriarchal paradigms.

While scholars continue to debate the merits of Tribble's argument for reading Genesis 3 as offering an egalitarian understanding of men and women,²⁶⁰ her incisive exegesis is exceptionally adept at exposing the flaws inherent in the logic of patriarchal interpretations of Genesis 2-3. Her rhetorically lucid and syntactically careful deconstruction of the theo-exegetical errors plaguing the foundations of the patriarchally-influenced interpretations that have dominated understanding of Genesis 2-3 clear away millennia of embellishment and leave exposed those gaps in the narrative that might be explored for alternative meanings evidenced in the text. The tremendous grace of her feminist scholarship establishes Tribble's rhetorical analyses of Genesis 2 -3 as a critical turning point in the history of interpreting Genesis 3.

²⁵⁹ Tribble's singular indictment of patriarchal interpretations fundamentally concerns violations to the rhetorical integrity of the narrative: "As ideas supposedly drawn out of the narrative, they fail to respect the integrity of this work as an interlocking structure of words and motifs with its own intrinsic value and meaning. In short, these ideas violate the rhetoric of the story." (Tribble, 73.)

²⁶⁰ As noted by contemporary feminist scholar Gale A. Yee in *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil In the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), "...recent studies...strongly question the notion that Genesis 2-3 is as liberating for women as Tribble thinks it is. They prefer to admit the androcentricism of the Bible and to deconstruct its conceptually vulnerable system of logic."

Yee herself employs a materialist approach that "concur[s] that an androcentric society...encodes an androcentric ideology in its literary production." In Yee's work, she prefers to examine Genesis 2-3 through an analyses of its internal logic, as evidenced from analyses of the various ideologies employed in its dominant mode of production. Her emphasis remains on critical analyses of gender ideologies that encoded the dominant literary themes of the text. Gale A. Yee, *Poor Banished Children of Eve: Woman as Evil In the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 68.

Appendix D
H.G. Mitchell:
Humanity's "Fall" into Maturity

It can hardly be the idea of the Jahwist that the moral judgment of the first pair was disturbed by their transgression, for, according to his account, when they yielded to temptation they did not possess the knowledge of good and evil, and the operation of this faculty, when first acquired, was perfectly normal; as soon as their eyes were opened they saw that they were naked. He says, further, that on seeing that they were naked they at once, in obedience to a normal impulse, took measures to clothe themselves, thus indicating that their consciences were active and their wills unimpaired.²⁶¹

Thus, it appears that the Jahwist does not teach that the moral nature of mankind was wrecked by the first disobedience, but, on the other hand, that it was this act which made the first pair independent moral beings. He must, therefore, have thought of them as leaving Paradise, in spite of the lapse of which they had been guilty, in possession of the same ability to obey the will of Jehovah, however, it might be revealed to them, which they had when they were created.²⁶²

In "The Fall and its Consequences according Genesis, Chapter 3," Hinkley G. Mitchell seeks to assess what the Eden narrative offers by way of teachings on humanity's "fall."²⁶³ Guided by the biblical critical insights most current to his historical context, Mitchell begins by establishing the parameters of his analysis of Genesis 3 as including only those verses considered "original" the Jahwist.²⁶⁴ This clarification is primarily offered as the foundation that establishes his pre-emptive decision to ignore the presence of "the tree

²⁶¹ Mitchell, 924-925.

²⁶² Mitchell, 925-926.

²⁶³ H.G. Mitchell, "The Fall and its Consequences according Genesis, Chapter 3," in *The American Journal of Theology*, Volume 1, Number 4 (October, 1897) pp. 913-926.

²⁶⁴ Advocated by scholar Carl Budde and other contemporaries. See footnote I: Mitchell, 913.

of life” -- suggested by scholars such as Carl Budde to owe its existence to a later reactor. Mitchell argues that the combination of the tree’s insignificance in the unfolding drama of the narrative, and its pedigree as “textual corruption,” renders it too incidental to merit interpretive analysis. The importance of this decision merits careful consideration, but we must wait until further on in our discussion of Mitchell’s work to appreciate its significance. For now, it is sufficient that Mitchell, secure in the knowledge he is working with the most original version of the story, looks to discern the teaching of the Jahwist on human destiny, as he unravels the varied and contested meanings of the text.

Fundamentally, Mitchell writes to “ascertain, if possible,” the Jahwist’s understanding of “the original condition of man” – that is, to discern the theological anthropology presumed in the drama of Genesis 3. With this in mind, Mitchell imports insights offered in the previous chapter, seeking to offer the roots or contextual foundation, of the anthropology formulated in Genesis 3. From his reconnaissance of Genesis 2 – 3, Mitchell finds evidence that humanity is equipped "with the capacity to enjoy the world into which [they were] ushered."²⁶⁵ Manifesting "a considerable degree of intelligence (evidenced in the man’s success in discerning names appropriate to the animals’ natures)...the ability to balance motives and eager to increase [their] powers...and free wills, or the ability to determine their own actions and destinies," Mitchell recognizes humanity as being appropriately equipped to thrive in their new creaturely existence.²⁶⁶

Notably, whereas theological anthropologies traditionally associated with Genesis 3 commit significant effort to signifying how gender differences contribute to the drama of human sin, yet with a disciplined abstinence suggestive of intent, Mitchell’s interpretation

²⁶⁵ Mitchell, 913.

²⁶⁶ Mitchell, 915.

fastidiously lacks the hierarchal gender-typing characteristic of dominant patriarchal paradigms.²⁶⁷ When sexual differentiation is introduced, Mitchell notes, its distinctiveness facilitates the nature of companionship Jehovah deems most appropriate for humanity's relational well-being "The social instinct manifested itself in the first man as soon as he was created, and when Jehovah, declaring that it is not good for him to be alone, made him a companion..."²⁶⁸ For "the pair," as Mitchell calls the first man and woman, the design innovation of sexual differentiation functions to develop a richer relational affinity. "The first pair" immediately develops, "a fitting attachment for each other."²⁶⁹

Continuing to attend to the Jahwist's focus on anthropology, Mitchell asserts that in this initial formation, humanity is lacking "only one of its subsequent endowments, 'the knowledge of good and evil.'"²⁷⁰ Mitchell eventually establishes that what the Jahwist offers is a description of the first man and woman,

...although they were otherwise perfectly equipped, were originally without the capacity to distinguish for themselves between right and wrong...²⁷¹

As a consequence, Mitchell concludes, humanity's *condition* is akin to that of children, "who,

²⁶⁷ It has been suggested that the Victorian attitude towards sexuality, dominant in Mitchell's time, influenced his gender sensibilities. Whether this is the case remains to be debated. While mindful of the influence of context, this explanation as the sole or primary factor in Mitchell's distinctive anthropology would suggest that more exegetes equally entrenched in the Victorian context would have produced similar anthropologies showing the same lack of gender bias in their perspectives with regards to interpreting Genesis 3. If indeed that were the case, Mitchell's perspective would not appear so distinctive or appear anachronistic for his time. It remains for another to examine whether other interpretations of Genesis 3, contemporaneous with Mitchell, present anthropologies for the first human pair that do/not show this same treatment of gender.

²⁶⁸ Mitchell, 915.

²⁶⁹ Mitchell, 915.

²⁷⁰ Mitchell, 915.

²⁷¹ Mitchell, 916.

as the saying is, have not arrived at the age of accountability.”²⁷² Notably, Mitchell describes humanity’s experience of being without the ability (associated with maturity) to distinguish between right and wrong, as a condition. Here, as in prior mention of humanity’s knowledge of good and evil, Mitchell refrains from assigning to humanity any inherent lack - - for which the term *nature* would have been appropriate. Rather, he conceptualizes the condition of being without capacity to distinguish between good and evil as an immaturity – making explicit that moral maturity is the destiny of humanity.²⁷³ Conceptually, the import of single for Immaturity is not an enduring feature of human nature -- as some are wont to argue, he points out.

However, the notable lack offers Mitchell the opportunity to engage debates over the meaning of “the knowledge of good and evil.” Mitchell favors the conclusion that dismisses the former “utilitarian application,” argues that the knowledge in question represents a “moral signification” as it emerges in line with usages in 2 Sam 14:17; 1 Kings 3:9, and later manifests as humanity’s awareness “of their own nakedness.”²⁷⁴ Yet, his agreement with Budde does not hinder him from proposing that the knowledge can be recognized as a moral distinction based on other evidence given in the passage itself.²⁷⁵ In making his case, Mitchell first establishes, “the lack of the knowledge of good and evil, regardless of what these terms [good and evil] mean, implies the lack of capacity to distinguish between [good and evil].”²⁷⁶ He then moves to establish the insight that divine prohibition (Genesis 2.17) assumes humanity *already* exercises a capacity, “to distinguish between things advantageous

²⁷² Mitchell, 916.

²⁷³ Mitchell, 916.

²⁷⁴ Carl Budde, Mitchell, 916.

²⁷⁵ Mitchell, 916.

²⁷⁶ Mitchell, 916.

and disadvantageous is taken for granted.”²⁷⁷ Mitchell recognizes this ability is a necessary pre-condition, introducing the very possibility of humanity observing any divine prohibition; indeed, in its absence, Mitchell argues,

What would have been the use of the declaration, “In the day when thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (2.17), if he to whom the words were addressed had no notion of the desirable as distinguished from the undesirable?²⁷⁸

This “capacity to distinguish between things advantageous and disadvantageous,” not only implies the awareness of “the desirable as distinguished from the undesirable,” that Mitchell suggests, but in the context of Genesis 2.17, also consists of two other inherent assumptions. The first assumption involves the recognition that the death promised in Genesis 2.17 “in dying you shall die,” is harmful and among that which is “disadvantageous” and not to be desired by humanity; the second assumption concerns humanity’s orientation as desiring to avoid harm and seek benefit. These clarifications become critical to understanding how Mitchell argues for “the capacity to distinguish between things advantageous and disadvantageous,”²⁷⁹ as distinct from the knowledge of good and evil which he translates as a “moral capacity” suggestive of being able to recognize *merit* or *virtue* inherent in God’s warning. Mitchell argues against popular suggestions that:

Had he (man) withstood temptation, he would have known that he had remained loyal to the will of God, i.e. good, and kept himself aloof of evil. He would, thus, without partaking of the fruit, by overcoming temptation have attained the knowledge of good and evil, only in a very different and not maleficent manner.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Mitchell, 916.

²⁷⁸ Mitchell, 916.

²⁷⁹

²⁸⁰ Mitchell here quotes Strack, (*Genesis*, p. 15) but also includes Delitzsche (*Genesis*,

Thus, Mitchell suggests that while equipped in every other good way, humanity lacks the initial capacity to discern between right and wrong. The significance of this insight informs the distinction that characterizes Mitchell's understanding humanity before eating of the tree of knowledge, and after. In describing the importance of the transition in human nature wrought through the drama of Genesis 3, Mitchell describes the first human pair as expressing "the condition of children, who, as the saying is, have not arrived at the age of accountability."²⁸¹

To the fully developed man of the present day, the original condition of the race, as depicted in the third chapter of Genesis, is not an enviable one, but the author of the chapter evidently took a different view of it. To him it doubtless seemed better to be without the troublesome power to decide for oneself in matters of right and wrong...true, one could not be good in the fullest sense of the term, but one could forego that possibility, especially since goodness of the childlike kind was rewarded by the most abundant blessings that one at the date of the story could imagine. Was it not enough to enjoy the best that the earth could produce, without toil or pain, or, so long as the single condition on which it all depended was fulfilled, anxiety lest the happiness enjoyed should ever come to an end?²⁸²

In what is Mitchell's apology for what he suggests to be the Jahwist's preference in accounting for why God appears to deny humanity a necessary good associated with the fullest maturing of their moral capacities. Mitchell presents the interpretation that the lack of knowledge represented no absence of blessing for humanity – but rather an idyllic provision of such abundance that no modification could have been imagined as improving

p.97) and Dillman (*Genesis*, p.69) and Budde (*B.U.*, p. 74) as maintaining similar arguments. Mitchell, 916-917.

²⁸¹ Inherently, he assumes a developmental anthropology in the lineage of Irenaeus, who XXXX insert brief description of typological features of Irenaeus anthropology. Mitchell, 916.

²⁸² Mitchell, 918-919.

the lot of humanity, even if maturity of knowledge of a particular kind were lacking.

Still, this leaves Mitchell, with others, to puzzle: But why does God object to humanity gaining something that is good? That God prohibits the eating of that which is vital for making humanity wise, is perplexing. The divine's clear reticence over humanity part-taking in what is necessary to grow wisdom is generally not interpreted as God withholding something good from humanity. The puzzlement of commentators over the prohibition inspires Mitchell to explore the possibilities. He opts to promote that which best harmonizes the apparent disjuncture. He proposes the interpretation that the prohibition was intended to pass after a time -- it as only temporary.

In addressing what humanity is capable of, Mitchell clarifies there is a distinction between humanity's basic capacity to distinguish between that which is "un/desirable," and the more-substantive moral capacity expressed as a knowledge of good capable of manifesting virtue, or what he calls, "a moral distinction in action."²⁸³ Mitchell distinguishes between a mere cognizance, that awareness of the good embodied in such knowledge, recalling the scriptural insight that "even the demons know what is good...and tremble." Mitchell rejects J. Wellhausen's argument that the knowledge of good and evil simply to "a classification of things as helpful or harmful," which represents "only another name for culture, civilization."²⁸⁴ His critical distinction between knowledge that merely recognizes moral distinctions and a "moral *capacity*" (italics mine) that manifests as a *practice of knowing good* fulfilled when good discerned is enacted, or confirmed in an intentional exercise of

²⁸³ Generally speaking, the former is a fear-based response guided by desire to avoid pain or suffering, found in even the most formative stages of human development, as when infant cry in protest, seeking to avoid hunger pains or the discomfort of wetness. The latter is a choice or decision, inspired by longing for goodness, made with intention that is willing to confront struggle with pain or suffering in the process of pursuing virtue.

will.²⁸⁵ Of greatest import is Mitchell's description the knowledge of good and evil as "a moral distinction in actions," or knowledge that not only enables one to know what is good (as the demons do) but cultivates desire to become good, and to do good. Thus, moral discernment for Mitchell proceeds from *virtuous intent* and is cultivated through the free exercise of will to produce *virtuous action*.

As he observes that the Jahwist "meant to picture these first human beings as endowed with free wills, or the ability to determine their own actions and destinies,"²⁸⁶ it might appear that Mitchell, in Augustinian form, seeks to establish a clear and direct connection between choices made by humanity, and either purity of moral desire, or moral maturity. However, that is precisely the epistemological relationship between knowledge, desire, and virtue that Mitchell's exposition refutes as he interprets the nature of the knowledge of good and evil. Neither moral purity nor and maturity are equated in the understanding of moral knowledge described by Mitchell, as evidenced in his comment that the Jawhist originally depicts humanity as lacking the epistemological capacity (associated with possessing moral discernment) necessary to create the possibility of choosing virtue it.

Mitchell makes clear that humanity's ability to distinguish between harmful and advantageous by no means confirms that humanity possesses either a moral appreciation or a preference for moral virtue, over other alternatives. Thus, the critical component necessary for creating the possibility of *choosing virtue* is identified by Mitchell as, "*the troublesome power to decide for oneself in matters of right and wrong.*" With out this capacity – the power to will -- Mitchell rightly concludes, epistemological awareness fails to enact what can be properly deemed, "good."

²⁸⁵ Mitchell references J. Wellhausen, "Wellhausen's *Prolegomena*, p. 318."

²⁸⁶ Mitchell, 915.

It proves valuable here to explore the multi-dimensionality of Mitchell's theological anthropology in establishing distinctions between *the knowing that promotes the good of obedience*, in contrast to the *goodness understood by virtue*. Where the threat of punishment is in place, the rhetoric inherent in the prohibition expressed in Genesis 2.17 and 3.3-5 makes it clear that what is at stake in humanity's response is *compliance*. The intelligence of self-interest or desire for self-preservation are sufficient to motivate the healthy aversion necessary to stay away from that which promises death. Clearly, the concern for the subsequent or mediated benefits of compliance is ultimately associated with obedience, but not so with virtue. The adage, "virtue is its own reward" helps identify the primary distinction between obedience and virtue: virtue desires to secure goodness for its own sake, rather than utilizing the good to secure something else desired. Thus, such a question of benefits helps highlight that, regardless of what benefits are lost or gained, virtue acts to secure goodness, and by doing so, is understood to be good.

In this sense, Mitchell's understanding of the knowledge of good anticipates the awareness that virtue maintains a not only a detachment to benefits or mediated goods, but also a willingness to risk losing that which secures a good, rather than be denied becoming good. Mitchell credits virtuous desire with the capacity to risk, the openness to the possibility of being without a good, in order to manifest goodness itself. In this the importance of Mitchell's decision to distinguish between a knowing that is conceptual and used as a means to another end, and a knowing of good that engages the capacities of will together with knowing and desire manifests that distinction which becomes the foundation of an understanding of faithfulness that is Thus, while obedience confirms fidelity to a healthy self-interest and desire for self-preservation -- both praiseworthy characteristics in accounted for the prudence of a decision, to be sure -- it cannot be suggested to establish

humanity as virtuous.

Returning to Mitchell's acknowledgment that humanity is initially able to distinguish between what is dis/advantageous, it is clearer now why the avoidance of harm that is accomplished by heeding the warning against eating of the tree, only establishes humanity as having the ability to grasp and comply with understandings of what is beneficial and what is harmful. This makes clear that the nature of obedience associated with the prohibition involves willing or submission.

Conversely, the error in commentators insisting that humanity's compliance with the divine prohibition would have confirmed humanity's virtue, is exposed. Refusing to eat of the tree because one is forbidden – to say nothing of being threatened with death for failure to comply – renders ambiguous whether compliance suggests any more than avoiding bringing promised harm to themselves. Indeed, humanity's obedience can even be said to confirm that humanity held the conviction that God was indeed capable or powerful enough to make good on the threat of death. However, to the suggestion that obedience would have established humanity's devotion or commitment to God, the following objections must be raised. The argument that humanity's obedience to God's prohibition could have proven humanity's innocence and virtue (as opposed to the proof of guilt and vice/sin suggested in by interpretations that humanity disregarded God's restriction of the tree) is flawed by its failure to account for the bounded nature of obedience in Genesis 2-3. The paradigm of obedience, as constructed through the prohibition against eating of a tree, is clearly premised on the threat of impending punishment for violation. Rhetorically, this functions as a glass ceiling restricting what motivations can be assigned for compliance to the prohibition. Certainly, *in the absence of threat*, it may have been possible to suggest that obedience points to an intent more virtuous than avoidance of harm. However, the clear presence of the

promise of death has the effect of re-aligning the rhetorical structure of the prohibition such that the only motivations that can be conclusively affirmed through humanity's obedience is intelligence of self-interest and/or the desire for self-preservation.

In the context of Genesis 2-3, the nature of obedience, as a decision, is presented very clearly. Obedience here denotes nothing of the need to trust, as the presence of a prohibition makes clear, or makes visible, what has the soundest benefits. If no risk is involved in choosing, the nature of virtue as a free choice for that which is good is not at stake. So wherein lies the virtue of a choice made because it avoids harm or seeks to secure its own good? If the prohibition is only understood as securing the avoidance of harm, wherein lies the cause for condemnation of violating virtue/sin? If the violation is diagnosed only because prohibition was issued by God, then nature of breach is disobedience, and can only be deemed "sin" by virtue (no pun intended) of expressing disobedience of God. In such a configuration, compliance *to God* mediates what is "good" and refusal to comply represents "evil."

The deeper insight that emerges here is that the mere convergence desire (what one wants) and knowledge (what is true) do not necessarily accomplish a virtuous choice. This is because there is nothing particularly meritorious morally-speaking (that is, where virtue is concerned) in decisions that avoid trouble or harm, just as *awareness* of that something is good, in and itself, does not describe that desirable sophistication of discernment resulting in the wisdom said come through the knowledge of good and evil. According to Cassuto, the unusual verb tenses uniquely present in Genesis 3.6 describe a the magnificent complexity of human nature that emerges in Eden. Here we recognize echoes of the insights borne out in the description Augustine offers of his will in bondage, detailed in his *Confessions*. Mitchell suggests that only in its ability to ascribe to humanity the "troublesome power to decide," do

we finally and properly understand what the Jahwist mean in speaking of “the knowledge of good and evil.” Only as it is confirmed in the text that humanity has exercised the capacity to choose, *Vis a Vis* a desire for good that is discerned as knowledge, is Mitchell willing to concede that humanity manifests knowing good and evil. The element of intention becomes critical in understanding how Mitchell accounts for the presence of good that counts morally, that is, as virtue.

But unlike obedience, virtue is cultivated only when awareness and intention converge in a practice of discernment and decision. It is possible that Mitchell assumes this understanding of virtue as we review his reasons for refuting arguments by other commentators, who argue humanity would have attained to both virtue and the knowledge associated with the tree, if only they had resisted the temptation to eat of the tree: “had the temptation been resisted, the result would have been the development of the first pair, thus voluntarily choosing good, of a knowledge of the distinction between it and its opposite...”²⁸⁷

Mitchell implies that a decision intended to avoid harm to one’s self cannot be collapsible with understandings of virtue associated with decisions in the good is chosen primarily from a desire for the good, independent of any benefits assessed as being mediated by the choice. As he frames it, it is only in the exercise of decision, following a practice of discernment, that any wisdom mediated through a knowledge of good and evil can properly emerge. Here, Mitchell offers peerless insight into the nature of goodness. Identifying the conditions of human existence required to manifest the good as virtue, he makes explicit the reality that humanity cannot become “...good in the fullest sense of the term” apart from

²⁸⁷ Mitchell, 916.

the ability to choose the good “for goodness’ sake,” as the expression goes, or more precisely, to express an intention to embrace goodness borne of a desire for the good, regardless of benefits.

Mitchell must overcome the obstacle of disobedience and moral corruption suggested by Augustinian interpretations that insist on correlating humanity’s decision to eat of the tree of knowledge as manifesting both a corruption of desire, and a willful rebellion against God. Therefore, Mitchell suggests that the Genesis 3 narrative only offers evidence that the Jahwist conceptualized the first man and woman as not yet required to exercise moral capacity. He builds this Irenaen argument by suggesting the pre-knowledge of good and evil state of humanity implies a child-like condition of pre-cognition bereft of both the capacity grasp the prohibition, and the responsibility to exercise the discernment that lies at the heart of any effort to cultivate human virtue. Instead, humanity is given only directions to follow -- with the subsequent threat that harm will follow any deviating from the instructions. Mitchell clearly recognizes the limits of such a prohibition: only certainty of humanity’s compliance, or lack thereof, can ever be established. Mitchell’s analysis comes imbued with many compelling insights on this point.

The first important point for our purposes is that rote compliance or obedience can no more confirm virtue than can a rabbit’s decision to run in order to avoid becoming the prey of a hunting fox. In the Schleiermachian sense, there is neither virtue in the rabbit running to save its life any more than there is vice in the fox’s chasing the rabbit to feed itself – only the reality that the good each creatures seeks ultimately threatens the continued existence – the goodness of being – of the other. Here, Mitchell’s rendering of knowledge of good and evil, and of the virtue embodied in it, can be recognized for the implicit critique it is of interpretive traditions that seek to elevate a survival decision to heed a threat

something more than the mere presence of a biological desire to avoid pain and suffering. Compliance to such a threat would only show that humanity was understandably motivated by either a biological desire to avoid punishment, or instinct to forego suffering. At the heart of such a critique lies the provocative question: does fearing punishment (however laudable and sober-minded) offer proof of virtuous intent fueled by desire for the good?

Mitchell's work offers the simple recognition: at no point in portraying humanity's failure to honor the prohibition does the text even remotely suggest that generations of patriarchal reading of the drama of Genesis 3 (offered in the Augustinian perspectives of Cassuto and others) got it right. Mitchell finds nothing in the text that allows him offer credence to past interpretations that insist humanity was infected by a rebellious desire to reject both the divine commands, and the divine that commands. His interpretive claims are appreciatively more modest and accurate in addressing the content of the text. He confirms that the text, again via the threat and prohibition, presumes humanity experiences desire that can recognize threats and respond to avoid harm, but he offers no evidence that any kind of antithetical desire in humanity was at work, cultivating in the first man and woman an attraction to vice that might motivate their decision to eschew the command. Lacking textual evidence, Mitchell does not elaborate such a tradition of patriarchal fiction.

Rather, Mitchell's conceptualization of humanity, vis a vis the divine prohibition, implicitly challenges interpretative traditions that have assumed a one-to-one correspondence between humanity's decision to eat of the tree of knowledge and humanity's desire for virtue – or lack thereof. For instance, Cassuto's Augustinian interpretation insists that humanity's action revealed its moral orientation. His Augustinian argument follows that if humanity had complied or obeyed God, rather than insisting on exercising its freedom to will in disobedience of God's warning – humanity's virtue would have established rather

ushering in the vice that results in its “fall” and destitution. In less dramatic contrast, Mitchell’s exposition refutes the Augustinian formula that humanity’s non-compliance is related the corruption of moral desire (so that humanity would actually desire vice).

Rather, Mitchell, in articulating an Irenaean anthropology, portrays the first man and woman as being childlike, and lacking in the maturity reflected in moral sensitivity and virtuous practice. Immaturity is reflective of the lack of moral sensitivity. Indeed, while laudable to fear the threat of suffering or pain, Mitchell’s work can be understood as challenging assumptions that compliance, otherwise framed as obedience, is not indicative of virtue. In this, Mitchell can be seen as anticipating a later critique of patriarchal appropriations of Augustine that attempt to argue or imply that, ultimately, rote compliance is sufficient to fulfill virtue or confirm humanity’s righteousness. This critique fuels the exploration of Mitchell’s understanding of human faithfulness.

Obedience presumes the presence of alternatives that constitute the existence of a choice, and the capacity of humanity to make a choice, but Mitchell recognizes virtue is still not merely a matter of exercising the power to act or make decisions in describing free will as “the ability to determine [one’s] own actions and destinies,” is it clear that Mitchell assumes humanity needs a *mature capacity for knowledge* without which, any exercise of power remains merely act, and fails to express the capacity to determine one’s actions and destinies towards virtue, that Mitchell associates with a power to will that is truly *free*.²⁸⁸ In the absence of freedom, there may be (as he suggests there was) the power to will, but the exercise of such power cannot rightly be called a “choice” because freedom is lacking. Likewise, where knowledge is lacking, there is not the freedom afforded by truth to know

²⁸⁸ Mitchell, 916.

clearly what is good – and in the absence of such knowledge, a decision is no more “free” than a caged animal is free to “choose” to eat when it is deprived of food except during feeding times.

Without knowledge that is true, there is no genuine clarity making it possible for an exercise of power to represent a choice that confirms either the virtue of the choice or the chooser. If “the relation of man to God is one of “absolute dependence,” then Mitchell rightly discerns: no true “goodness” can prevail because obedience in the absence of choice does not fulfill righteousness: it remains – however benign or well-intended and without malice – a glorified form of compulsion or coercion. Mitchell therefore argues that in lacking the knowledge to make “moral distinctions,” the first humans were without moral capacity because they could not express (“*in actions*”) a *desire* for the good that could impute virtue to either themselves or their choices.²⁸⁹

Thus, Mitchell raises the obvious question of why Jehovah, who is loving, should want to keep us, his favorite creatures from having the knowledge of good and evil. In his survey of suggestions, he cites Buddes who claims the prohibition “was only a temporary regulation; that perhaps Jehovah would finally have permitted man to partake of the tree if he had proven obedient, and secured him against any evil consequences.”²⁹⁰

There are noticeable convergences between traditional Augustinian understandings of freewill and that which Mitchell sees developing in Genesis 3. He makes reference to human freewill in offering an account of how humanity’s profound freedom extends even to having some authorship in matters of destiny. In point of fact, it is humanity’s freewill that allows the Jahwist to protect God from being responsible for the disobedience that results

²⁸⁹ Mitchell, 918.

²⁹⁰ Mitchell, 918.

from an immature and innocent humanity having access to the dangers represented in the power of the tree of knowledge: "The freedom of the first pair to eat or refrain from eating, especially in view of the penalty attached to its improper exercise, relieved their Maker from any such responsibility [for the disobedience]"²⁹¹

However, in Mitchell's work freewill does not evolve any further in the direction that one might expect, given the term's historical association with Augustine's understanding of the human condition, which, as noted earlier in the chapter on Cassuto, is "an exalted condition of 'original righteousness,'" according to Hick, who also notes the lack of "heavenly or paradise state" and the identity of the serpent as not being "a fallen angel."²⁹² In that Mitchell's interpretation of humanity's condition in Genesis 3 gives no suggestion of prideful corruption of human desire, nor associates any rebellion with humanity's exercise of freewill in Eden, he cannot be said to be endorsing an Augustinian understanding of Genesis 3 as a narrative of human failing. Indeed, in many ways, Mitchell's work appears to stand as a systematic refutation of the erroneous assumptions commonplace in interpretations that offer a less than critical appropriate of key assumptions borrowed from an Augustinian exegesis of Genesis 3: woman's failure leading.

It becomes evident that an Irenaean anthropology influences Mitchell's conceptualization of humanity in Genesis 3 as initially manifest in a season of innocence and childhood before undergoing a process of maturation.²⁹³

According to the Jahwist, although they were perfectly equipped, were originally without the capacity to distinguish for themselves between right and wrong; in other words,

²⁹¹ Mitchell, 919.

²⁹² Hick, 204.

²⁹³ Mitchell, 916.

were in the condition of children who, as the saying is, have not arrived at the age of accountability.²⁹⁴

By ascribing to humanity a child-like innocence and ignorance Mitchell explains the Jahwist's defense of humanity's original state of unknowing without reverting to an Augustinian understanding of "original righteousness." Augustine's understanding of humanity as possessing a righteousness that was lost, comes, of course, fettered by a correlative understanding of "original sin" that imputes on humanity a fundamental corruption of which, Mitchell will argue, there is no account in the Genesis 3 text.

In Mitchell's description of "original man," humanity is *not* described as perfect or righteous (which would connote the presence of the moral capacity to discern that is ascribed as becoming humanity's only after eating of the tree, suggesting a creative invention on the part of Augustine's interpretations of Genesis 3). Rather, humanity is described persistently as being understood to be just shy one of the "subsequent abilities," namely the knowledge of good and evil. Why did God make humanity this way? Lacking the good of moral maturity? Mitchell assumes the good intent of the Jahwist and asserts,

To [the Jahwist] it doubtless seemed better [for humanity] to be without the troublesome power to decide for oneself in matters of right and wrong. It was much simpler to live by the word proceeding from the mouth of Jehovah. [Mitchell surmises the Jahwist's argument might have assumed] True, one could not be good in the fullest sense of the term, but one could forego that possibility, especially since goodness of the childlike kind was rewarded by the most abundant blessings that one at the date of the story could imagine.²⁹⁵

An understanding of humanity in formation further allows Mitchell to account for humanity's "error" in failing to observe divine command – a failure readily explained

²⁹⁴ Mitchell, 916.

²⁹⁵ Mitchell, 918.

through interpretations of humanity as children immature in the very capacity for moral discernment that accounts for their misjudgment – while explaining how God’s prohibition remains appropriate. [Without denying the need for humanity’s transformation following in the wake of this developmental perspective of humanity, Mitchell is willing to concede a lack of foresight on the part of the author of the passage.]²⁹⁶

He acknowledges the puzzlement that naturally follows having the path to the obvious virtue of “moral maturity” guarded by divine prohibition with the threat of death if violated –especially as a latent form of that capacity is presumed to already be present (and therefore a recognized good) in humanity by the very issuing of a divine prohibition. He notes: “What would have been the use of the declaration [of the prohibition in 2:17] if he to whom the words were addressed had no notion of the desirable as distinguished from the undesirable?”²⁹⁷ This is “the knowledge of good and evil” that completes their formation as moral agents.

A Word on the Serpent

In the course of his inquiry – which encompasses reflections on the scholarly debate over the nature of “the knowledge of good and evil,” and the reason for God’s prohibition against humanity eating of the source of such epistemological illumination Mitchell takes great pains to defend the serpent against the Augustinian legacy that identifies it as an

²⁹⁶ “The safer view is that the Jahwist, believing...that childhood was the ideal state, represented it as the original condition of the race, and without further thought as to the connection, introduced by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, suggested...to explain how the first man and woman attained moral maturity.” Mitchell, 919.

²⁹⁷ Mitchell, 916.

incarnation or “mask for Satan.”²⁹⁸ Nor does Mitchell make much of allegorical arguments by contemporaries such as Reuss, who claim that “the serpent is a personification of the instinct that impels man to emerge from the condition of childhood,”²⁹⁹ or Schultz, who argues the serpent “symbolizes the animal principle in the man.”³⁰⁰ In particular, he finds such arguments un-compelling because the logic of such conclusions is unable to recover any significant rationale for the punishment that follows.³⁰¹ Rather, Mitchell finds the option of simply accepting that the serpent is a “real animal” least objectionable.

This establishes to his satisfaction through a refutation of possibilities with currency, he returns to build his case for a prior argument he has introduced: that for the Jahwist, the serpent nevertheless plays the role of a “third factor”³⁰² in the form of “tempter”,³⁰³ who is able to account for the weakened power of divine prohibition without undermining the nature of the divine. In other words, Mitchell sees the serpent as introducing the Jahwist’s

²⁹⁸ Despite being loathed to disagree, Mitchell draws this argument from Delitzsche, *Genesis*, 98. “One shrinks from differing from this sainted teacher or criticizing him and his fervent statements, but it would be impossible to accept his interpretation at this point.” Mitchell, 921.

²⁹⁹ Reuss from *A.T.*, III, 206f. and Schultz from *Alttestamentliche Theologie*, 609 ff. Mitchell, 920.

³⁰⁰ Mitchell, 920

³⁰¹ While Mitchell's argument here will be taken up in a later chapter, for now it is sufficient to point out that, Mitchell argues, “2) If it were admitted that the serpent was a mask for some other being, there would still be grounds for denying that the being supposed was Satan; for a) the doctrine of Satan as an evil power opposed to the Deity is considerably later than the story of the Fall...and b) the introduction of a positively evil being would have forestalled the very [etiological] object of the story, viz., to explain the origin of evil in the world. 3) This interpretation also, like the allegorical, breaks down when applied to the penalty inflicted on the serpent; for either, a) the serpent alone is punished, and the power of which it was the tool overlooked, or b) Satan is condemned to a degradation which hardly harmonizes with his subsequent position as a son o God and member of the heavenly court. See Job 1:6.” Mitchell, 921.

³⁰² Mitchell, 919

³⁰³ Mitchell, 922.

explanation for why humanity did not find the divine prohibition sufficiently compelling to observe.

Yet he distinctively denies that the serpent's participation merits condemnation or the assignment of any "evil character" to it:

The objection will doubtless be made that the serpent is, after all, an evil character. It must however be remembered that the author distinctly describes it as beast of the field, and, further, the best of the patriarchs used deception to accomplish their purposes...³⁰⁴

He points to its status as a "beast of the field" as the serpent's essential mode of being, hence accountability, and that, regardless, "deception," was commonly used by figures which of respect.

In regards to the character of the man and the woman, Mitchell looks to their motivations upon eating of the fruit and finds their actions to be reflect a healthy and sound response to the illumination that has just occurred,

It can hardly be the idea of the Jahwist that the moral judgment of the first pair was disturbed by their transgression, for, according to his account, when they yielded to temptation they did not possess the knowledge of good and evil, and the operation of this faculty, when first acquired, was perfectly normal; as soon as their eyes were opened they saw that they were naked. He says, further, that on seeing that they were naked they at once, in obedience to a normal impulse, took measures to clothe themselves, thus indicating that their consciences were active and their wills unimpaired.³⁰⁵

However, Mitchell's distinctive conclusion about the nature of humanity before and after eating of the tree, is quite radical. To recap: the first pair was not "originally" perfect or righteous: rather they have one of their subsequent abilities missing. Humanity is intended

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³⁰⁵ Mitchell, 924-925.

to become morally mature, via the tree of knowledge, but this immaturity is a lack. With lucidity Mitchell reasons, *humanity's moral orientation is not ruined by a choice to secure what they were suppose to become*, even while he allows them to have some guilt for violation the prohibition, "Thus it appears that the Jahwist does not teach that the moral nature of mankind was wrecked by the first disobedience."³⁰⁶

Moreover, because humanity's moral capacity was not even activated until after eating of the tree, it cannot be said, as some actually suggest, that humanity acted intentionally against God, a conclusion too often wrongly arrived at by those who advocate humanity acted from corruption, as if to assume they had the knowledge of evil prior to eating of the tree.

Thus, it appears that the Jahwist does not teach that the moral nature of mankind was wrecked by the first disobedience, but, on the other hand, that it was this act which made the first pair independent moral beings. He must, therefore, have thought of them as leaving Paradise, in spite of the lapse of which they had been guilty, in possession of the same ability to obey the will of Jehovah, however, it might be revealed to them, which they had when they were created.³⁰⁷

Finding no evidence suggesting that humanity was intended to remain without the knowledge of good and evil, Mitchell does not assign humanity's decision the kind of catastrophic connotation as does Augustine, Cassuto, and Tribble:

If the first man could not hope ever to be permitted to enjoy the forbidden fruit there is even less reason for asserting that, according to the Jahwist, he could ever have acquired the knowledge of good and evil in any other way.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ Mitchell, 925-926.

³⁰⁷ Mitchell, 925-926.

³⁰⁸ Mitchell, 917

In this way Mitchell critiques the logic of interpreters who attempt to argue from the assumption that the knowledge of the tree was good, and therefore God wanted it for the first human pair, and would have rewarded them with moral maturity at some point, if only humanity had not disobeyed and eating. Mitchell's disagreement remains with interpreters who agree that the tree was good, yet fail to recognize that the only way the text suggests this good will be gained, and is through complying with the audience. Humanity eating of the fruit is the only way the text assumes we will acquire this knowledge of good and evil.

According to Mitchell, the Jahwist indicates that it was not God's intent to deprive humanity of it; but only to allow humanity to enjoy the lavish, comfortable, and safe surroundings of Eden as long a possible. Mitchell finds no support of Augustinian "original sin." He does assign humanity guilt for not heeding the prohibition, but in no way sees the support such an innovation in interpretations of the text. To the contrary, arguing against suggestions that humanity underwent a moral change associated with he asserts that the soundness of humanity's decision in cover themselves, having realized they were naked, is evidence that they were of sound judgment and their moral capacities were in no way impaired.

Mitchell's perspective on the subject of the man's dominant status over the woman in their relationship as declared by God focuses on the nature of "desire" and the effect on the woman:[keep the quote below the two-liner here]Although he does not himself make note of the value of it, Mitchell addresses a vital point regarding the translation of *teshuqwua*:

The word rendered *desire* is found in only two other places in the Old Testament, Gen. 4:7 and Cant. 7:11 (10). In the former, where the text is doubtful, it can only mean *inclination*, and in the latter, where it is used of a man, it has the force of *affection*. There is ground, therefore, for the opinion that the author in this passage meant to make Jehovah say that the very tenderness of the woman for her husband would prove a

disadvantage to her. But it is not necessary to insist upon a changed interpretation, for, granted that the old one is correct, it has not the significance alleged, since the increased sensuality of the woman is represented, not as the effect of partaking of the forbidden fruit, but as a part of the penalty for so doing.

The discovery that the *msl* root translated into “rule” in Gen 3:16 is only done so because the association with the preposition, *be* normatively translated, “in, at, with, by, through,” is suggested to render it an idiom expressing the secondary meaning associated with authority expressed as a military dominance paradigm of “lording over.” *However*, note the following understanding of the translation: the woman's *tesbuqa* is for the man = your tenderness/affection/turn you with desire/will turn you towards the man (so that/and) he may/shall/will *msl + b* = make like[himself]/rule (as in lineage/reproduce/continue or make life like himself) through you. In such a reading, where the preposition *b* is translated as *in*, *through* seems viable, then the above interpretation can read with as much integrity as any others noted, and eliminates many of the historical issues that have been generated by traditional interpretative insistence that it refers unquestionably to power/domination in gender relations. While the verse certainly pertains to gendered realities/experiences, suggestions that they establish divinely sanctioned relational patterns of domination/submission have maintained a choke-hold, the more contextually appropriate understanding of the woman's desire for her husband reciprocally empowering her husband to be able to rule through her, rendering the verse an assurance that progeny – that all important concern of the ancient Israelites and nomadic peoples of the Ancient Near East – continues.

The clear appropriateness of this interpretation is further supported in the clearly related concerns about difficulties in conception expressed in the first part of the verse. Rendered thus, the entire verse reads as an expression of Divine provision that reassures the

woman that despite the reality of struggle around conception and difficulty with “bearing” (translated correctly as pregnancy) –suggestive of struggles carrying to term -- for the women, nevertheless the promise that the woman’s desire will turn her again and again, with affection, to her husband such that he will be able to rule through her, transforms a misinterpretation about punishment, into an epiphany of divine faithfulness. In the final analysis, Mitchell’s insightful note about the single word, *teshuqwa* uncovers a more original meaning to Genesis 3.16 as expressing God faithful intent to empower humanity’s ability to fulfill the only command addressed to the man and woman together: “be fruitful and multiply.”

What remains regrettable, especially given Mitchell’s refreshingly anachronistic disposition against the gender biases normative for field and historical context is his decision not to pursue further the implications of uncovering the meaning of *teshu’qua* with the same thoroughgoing consideration his work engaged the many other contested exegetical concerning Genesis 3.

