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The Cultural Predicament in Biblical Narrative

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We owe our concepts of culture and nature to the Romans. They set them up by *contrasting* between two different realms, as in reference to two dissimilar plots of land, one cultivated and the other uncultivated. But the concepts of culture and nature are more multifarious, and the relationship between them is more intertwined and complicated. Moreover, the historical origin of this distinction in Western thought is much more ancient, and the roots of these concepts in our thinking penetrate much deeper.¹ In what follows I discuss two ways in which the contrast between what we today distinguish as “culture and nature” was once drawn in ancient philosophical reflections on the cultural predicament of human beings. I do so by focussing on a Biblical narrative, discussing first the philosophical conceptions about the cultural predicament of human beings which emerge out of this narrative. I then turn to consider the problem encountered when trying to bring the form of discourse in which this narrative is fixed back into *philosophical* use.

I. TWO EDIFYING STORIES ABOUT THE FIRST HUMAN BEINGS

The ancient Hebrews lacked terms corresponding either to our term “culture” or “nature.”² They had one important word, however, which in English is translated as “Creation,” and in Hebrew is rendered as *briah*: a unique Hebrew word, derived from the verb *bara*, which is used in the Bible to describe the way in which in the beginning God created things, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, and which connotes *all of Creation*.³ It is against the background of this concept of Creation that they turned to reflect on what we today refer to as “culture” and “nature,” and it is in the context of this concept that they also contemplated what we are apt to call “the cultural predicament of human beings.” Their reflections on these matters were pursued by thinking about *being and becoming*, in particular about how things *came to be what they are*. This in turn led them to contemplate things in terms pertaining to a creator and his creation, and to reflect on them by adopting a discourse having the form of a narrated story. Content and form tend to support one another in this kind of discourse. For reflecting on things through the narrative of a story naturally leads to thinking about how they came to be what they are, while thinking about how things came to be what they are leads to telling stories about them.

The Plot Recast

The story of creation, and of the creation of human beings in particular, is told twice in the Bible: one time in chapter 1 of Genesis and another time in chapters 2 and 3 of that book. The two stories are quite different from one another. The first story begins literally at the beginning,⁴ with God creating the heavens and the earth on the first day. It continues up to the sixth day of creation, telling of what God created on each day. It tells how God separated light from darkness, land from water, how He made grass and trees grow on the land, how He stoked the water with living creatures and the sky with birds. On the sixth day, God made the earth give life to all sorts of animals. Finally, contemplating all that He had done, God created human beings. Human beings, like all other creatures, were created sexed, male and female. Unlike all other creatures, however, human beings were created in God's own image. This ends the act of creation in the first story.

From here time begins to unfold, and the way is open for human beings to do whatever it is that is natural for human beings to do: i.e., to act in accordance with the (human) predispositions bestowed on them by God. In the Bible what we have come to refer to as "nature," whether the nature of a particular creature or all of nature, is often described by reference to God's Creation. So that for a creature to act in accordance with his nature is to behave in ways that flow from the predispositions fixed on his kind by God. It is therefore also to act in ways that may be described as fulfilling what one was *destined* to do—by one's creator. Thus what we are apt to call "nature" or "character," whether the nature or character of an animal or a particular human being or even a whole people, reveals its destiny. The destiny (or nature) of created beings is determined by their creator and is bestowed on them by means of a blessing or a curse. In this first story God blesses all creatures, telling them that they are to multiply and inhabit the earth. He blesses humans in the same way, adding that they are to conquer the earth and make use of its plentiful vegetation for their bounty. The story ends with God's satisfaction at all that He has created, and the sanctity of the seventh day of the week as the day of rest.

In chapters 2 and 3 a very different story is told. This is not a story that unfolds literally from the beginning of all things, but one that begins only after the creation of the heavens and the earth, which at this stage is said to be barren of all grass. The story opens with God's creation of man. He creates him not in His own image, but as a single creature molded out of earth and into which He breathes life. After that God plants a garden in Eden and places man inside it. In this story (which places man's beginnings in what we have come to call "the Garden of Eden") God does not *bless* man. He *commands* him, telling him that he may eat from all the trees of the garden, save from "the tree of knowledge about good and evil." Following these events, God creates all the different species of animal life, and man gives them names. He then constructs a woman

out of the man's rib. The end of the story is narrated in chapter 3. The snake entices the woman to eat from the tree of knowledge. The woman and the man eat, realize that they are naked, and commence to clothe themselves. Subsequently they hear "God's voice walking about the garden" and attempt to hide. God admonishes them for having disobeyed His command and banishes them from His garden, accompanying their departure with various pronouncements about the hardships for which they are destined.

Edifying Narratives And Their Symbolic Interpretations

The first thing that should be noted regarding the Biblical stories of Creation is that they are a part of an incorporated, religious discourse which strives to provide a comprehensive *Weltanschauung*. Edifying stories of this sort, whether in the form of myths, religious narratives, historical epics, allegories, fables, and parables, just like their more expressive but less articulate spiritual relations, social rituals, and religious rites, are cultural artifacts which come wrapped in fanciful, illustrative accounts, bearing with them powerful images and pivotal ideas about matters of ultimate human concern. It is typical of such edifying narratives to embody their messages and insights in figurative accounts, depicting concrete, sometimes mundane but more often dramatic and stirring sequence of events. As these narratives are incorporated into the spiritual heritage of a culture, the figures and the events which are described in them acquire profound significance, as they are rendered into *symbols* which provide sustenance for cherished values, shared beliefs, hopes, and fears, as well as common attitudes and ways of life. When this happens they offer those who prize them a supporting framework of reference for beliefs and values from within which they can confront the world, experience things, and find meaning in the course of events around them.

Thus, for example, the figures depicted in the Bible throughout its various stories become for those who are brought up on them instructive *prototypes* of various possible human beings. Through them several striking features of human nature are displayed by lending them a tangible incarnation through the behavior of concrete, three-dimensional human beings. In this way worthy and abhorred traits of character are given a personified manifestation, and cultural values acquire a very powerful and dramatic representation: e.g., Sarah as the jealous wife and her reaction to her rival, Hagar, and her son Ishmael; Abraham as the embodiment of unquestioned human faith in God; Jacob as the personification of someone clever and conniving who manipulates people for personal gain; Esau as the hot-tempered simpleton who is better at hunting and toiling in the field than at reasoning. The family and political situations described in such a narrative become enlightening *paradigms* for thinking about relationships to parents, children, siblings, spouses, friends, compatriots, and

adversaries: e.g., Rebekah's preference for her younger son and Isaac's preference for the older; Jacob's devoted love for Rachel, for which he endures years of hardship; the envy aroused in Joseph's older brothers over their father's love for him; David's fear of his son Absalom, intermingled with his love for him. The dramatic events which engulf these figures become insightful *parables*, wise *allegories*, and instructive *examples* for determining right and wrong action. Through them present events are perceived and evaluated and morals are drawn about the ends of life: e.g., Cain's devious attempt to cast off personal responsibility for killing his brother Abel in a fit of envious rage; the trials and wanderings of a people in the desert as the unavoidable route to the promised land; Gideon's exemplary way of personally leading his men into battle; the way in which power corrupts as evidenced in David's lustful behavior toward Bathsheba and his betrayal of her husband Uriah in battle. It is in these and other ways that such stories eventually come to encapsulate in them a whole *Weltanschauung*.

Another striking way in which human beings make use of symbolization in connection with edifying narratives is by seeking to *interpret* them. In this capacity edifying narratives offer their users *reflective points of view* for contemplating matters of ultimate human concern. When so used they are often perceived by those who read them to be pregnant with deep and hidden meanings, which they then seek to uncover. It is typical of the way in which the Biblical stories are read, just perhaps as all ancient and sacred texts of all people are read, that they are perceived to harbor in them important messages whose meaning is manifested in the events which are described, the nature of the characters who play parts in them, and the specific words used to tell about them. As such these stories acquire the role of *symbolic narratives* which *provoke* in their reflective listeners and readers a response in the form of elaborate, *hermeneutical commentaries* in which these stories are interpreted and their symbolic meaning is displayed, in what we have come to refer to as a "reading." It is, of course, also typical of edifying, symbolic narratives that they can be interpreted—or read—in more ways than one.⁵

Edifying narratives and their symbolic interpretations go hand in hand, just as telling jokes and laughing at them go hand in hand. The first endeavor, that of relating an edifying, symbolic story, provides for a very powerful, tangible, primary mode of thinking; the second, that of interpreting it, provides for a more refined, articulated, and sophisticated form of reflection regarding those same ideas. Together, edifying narratives and their symbolic interpretations may form a constantly expanding and shifting cultural discourse in which a "rich interpretation" is used to uncover a "deep meaning." In the case of the Biblical stories of creation, they are distinguished by providing an edifying, religious, *symbolic narrative* for thinking about such topics as God, cosmos, being, becoming, human existence, and the relationships between all these. In so doing these stories also offer reflective points of view for contemplating

what we today are apt to refer to as “the cultural predicament of human beings within the natural scheme of things.”

One difficulty often encountered by commentators seeking to offer an interpretative reading of the Biblical narrative of creation is that it does not seem to provide a single, consistent narrative about the creation of human beings, but two different ones. Faced with this difficulty, much hermeneutical ingenuity in the past has gone into trying to show that the two stories of creation in the Bible, though seeming to contradict each other, actually complement one another. One way of doing so is to read the first story as describing the creation of human beings only in broad outlines, and the second as undertaking to fill in the details. While this way of conjoining the two stories provides an ingenious way of reading this narrative, there are certain inconsistencies between the two stories which are difficult to account for in this fashion. Moreover, as I shall show, it is philosophically more insightful to read the narrative as comprising two separate and different stories. As I read the Biblical narrative about the creation of human beings, it provides two different *philosophical stories*, in each of which a different attempt is made both to understand and to account for the human predicament in the context of God’s Creation. Read this way they can be seen to provide two different *philosophical conceptions* of what we today call “the *cultural predicament* of human beings” and its relationship to what we call “nature.” The two different conceptions coincide with what I have called here the two different stories of creation, and they are propounded and articulated by means of the details through which these stories are told. It is therefore to the details of each story that we need to turn first.

II. A READING FOR THE FIRST STORY

One striking feature about the first story is that, unlike the second, it ends (as it starts) on a contented note. God looks upon all that He has created and finds it good, even very good. This judgement which is attributed to God does not seem to express a moral evaluation, as it is pronounced even after the act of creation on the first day, when only the heavens and the earth had been created. I like to see in this pronouncement the expression of an *aesthetic attitude of satisfaction*. God looks upon what He has created and finds it good in the way in which an artist might observe with satisfaction his finished artifact. The analogy between God’s Creation and a humanly created work of art brings out a central feature in the philosophical conception of the human predicament that comes out of this story. It is that there is something *aesthetically* satisfying about God’s Creation. This aesthetic attitude of satisfaction on the part of God both with Creation in general and with the creation of human beings in particular may be connected with a central point to come across from the first story: namely, that the first story deals with the human predicament only in passing,

in the context of a much larger, overall story that is being told about how *all things* came into being. All things came into being in the same way: they were created out of nothing by God, and their specific modes of behavior were bestowed on them by the grace of God.

A curious and puzzling feature in this story is the assertion that human beings were created “in God’s image.”⁶ This metaphor, which is only used in connection with the creation of human beings, has often been interpreted to mean that human beings alone, out of all the creatures of the earth, are endowed with a divine, spiritual essence which provides them with both *understanding and free will* and so enables them to be either (morally) good or bad. This interpretation of the story encourages those who put it forward to view the conception which emerges from this story about the cultural predicament of human beings as being essentially a moral one. From the reason given in the Biblical text for the creation of human beings in God’s image, however, it appears that something else is meant by it. The reason given in the Bible is that in this way human beings will “replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1.26) It appears that to be created in God’s image is to be endowed with an ability to rule over the earth and *dominate and subdue* its creatures in a way seen to be similar to God’s. Being in God’s image does not lend human beings a privileged, moral, spiritual essence that transcends what is bestowed by God on all the rest of Creation. It provides them only with an ability to *dominate* all other beings: to hunt down, conquer, subjugate, husband, domesticate, gather, pick, harvest, and make use of what God created for their own needs and pleasures. This conception of the human predicament coincides with the overall hunting and food-gathering perspective on human life pictured in this story.⁷ From the examples given in the text in connection with domination, it seems to stem from the creation and use of *techniques* for mastering and controlling natural creatures as well as parcels of nature. We may imagine that these have to do with taming animals, hunting and fishing strategies, or with techniques and skills for making tools, fashioning clothes, and constructing shelter.

To describe how human beings relate to things by subjugating and dominating them is to describe how they do so in terms of *wielding power*. Thus, what we tend to look upon as “the cultural predicament of human beings within the natural scheme of things” is described in the first story only in the context of the role they are destined to play in a *power relationship of domination* over things and other creatures. Human beings are creatures created by God with an ability to subjugate and dominate all other creatures and to make use of all that the earth brings forth for their own desires. So that it is in the broad use of power, to *conquer* the earth, *subjugate* its creatures, and *dominate* all that grows and lives on it, that the special, cultural predicament of human existence within the order of Creation is defined and the resemblance of human beings to God is expressed.

Maimonides' Interpretation

One, very suggestive and very different, way of reading this Biblical narrative is provided by Maimonides, who makes use of Aristotelian metaphysics to interpret it.⁸ In Maimonides' reading, the two stories of creation of human beings are interpreted as being parts of a single, unified story. The assertion that human beings were created in God's image is then interpreted by him to mean that from the very beginning they were endowed with an ability to engage in *rational thought*. It is this ability to comprehend things from a rational, contemplative point of view that distinguishes them from all the creatures of the earth and ultimately enables them to transcend their natural existence and natural perceptions about the world into metaphysical reflections that provide true understanding. On this reading, both what I referred to as "the first story" and "the second story" describe a state of human existence that is prior to the emergence of social norms in the form of conventions and customs of human cultures. And what both stories provide is a single philosophical account: an account which reveals how human beings were endowed by God with abstract, rational thought, and how they came to lose it through their social follies when they created cultural customs for themselves. In this view, when social norms in the form of conventions and customs do not cloud their minds, human beings have a unique, Godlike capacity of contemplating things from an untainted, abstract, and universal perspective, *sub specie aeternitatis*, that allows metaphysical insight and gives access to *true knowledge*. The story about the banishment of human beings from the Garden of Eden tells about the replacement in human lives of rational thought by conventions and customs. The result is thought which is clouded by the influence of social norms and a subsequent loss of true knowledge in the form of metaphysical insight about reality.

On this reading of the text rationality is not an essential ingredient in either the cultural or natural predicament of human beings. It stands apart from either of them. Therefore three possible modes of existence for human beings can now be distinguished: *rational, natural, and conventional*. And while humans were once affiliated with God in the first mode of being and with animals in the second, through their own social misdoings they created a third one, unique for themselves only: a mode of being provided for through social norms in the form of conventions and customs and through which much of what we refer to as "culture" takes shape. By adhering to social norms in the form of various conventions and by making them an integral part of their thinking, human beings lost the ability to attain metaphysical insight through rational thought, which, Maimonides believes, only true philosophers, who are capable of freeing their thinking from the influence of the conventions of their culture, may still attain.

A difficulty with this reading of the Biblical narrative is that it calls for a very *inventive* interpretation of the text. The idea of rationality put forward through this reading, as a form of metaphysical contemplation, seems to have

little in common with the concept of *subjugation of other creatures and domination* which is used in the narrative to describe the cultural predicament of human beings. If a concept of rationality is required to explain the way in which humans manage to dominate natural creatures and master their environment, a more fitting concept would be an *instrumental* one which equates rational thought with an ability to devise proper means for attaining desired ends. It is tempting therefore to interpret the ability given to human beings by their creator to dominate their environment as an innate ability referred to by philosophers as “Natural Reason.” In this way it may be easily identified with an innate talent for calculating or for perceiving the world from an instrumental perspective. In either account of rationality, however, this whole line of reasoning about *the kind of thinking* used by human beings to dominate other creatures is foreign to the form of the Biblical narrative. *Explanations* which seek to place the cultural predicament of human beings in the context of *fundamental principles* of existence, such as those that emerge in the form of *natural cause, reason, and convention*, are inherently *metaphysical*. They are grounded in a form of philosophical discourse which supplements symbolic narratives, such as the one considered here, and so should not be confused with them.

A Power-Oriented Conception

An important distinction which does emerge from this narrative is one that differentiates between *beings*, rather than between metaphysical principles of being, and it does so in two particular ways. One is through the concept of *creation*, as when differentiating between the Creator of all beings and created beings. Another is through the concepts of *subjugation and domination*, as when differentiating between subjugated and subjugating beings. Human beings share with what we refer to as “natural creatures” a common feature, in that they are all created beings. They share a common feature with God, in that they occupy a subjugating and dominating posture in their relationship to some other beings through their various hunting skills and technological innovations. As God subjugates and dominates all beings by determining their behavior when He creates them, whereas human beings subjugate and dominate by the use of their skills, crafts, and technological innovations, the concepts of subjugation and domination *symbolize*, rather than *explain*, the way in which human beings resemble God. The resemblance drawn between them and God suggests that the cultural predicament of human beings is perceived to constitute a state of existence that transcends the sort of (natural) existence that is created by God for all other beings. Symbolization is an important method in this form of philosophical reflection both for displaying perceived differences between things and also for enhancing perceived differences. With the case in point the concepts of subjugation and domination provide a symbol both for the way in which human

beings differ from other creatures and for the way in which they resemble God in their ability to wield power. Subjugation and domination, it may be said, are *a symbolic representation for a power-oriented relationship*. They provide a *perspective* from within which an important difference is perceived between the (cultural) ways of existence given to humans and the (natural) ones given to other creatures. To emphasize the importance of this difference the narrative first turns the relationship of subjugation and domination into a feature which is intrinsic to the relationship between God and all created beings, and then places human beings on the same side of this relationship as God. In this way the concepts of subjugation and domination are rendered into a symbolic representation for the place both of God and humans in their respective power relationship to all created beings, i.e., what we are apt to call "nature." Displaying the cultural predicament through a concept which equates human beings with God enhances the difference perceived between their (cultural) mode of existence and that of all other created beings, as well as the importance of the distinction thus made. At the same time it also provides a striking, power-oriented perspective for the way in which human beings relate to things, in contrast with the way other creatures do. In so doing it provides a very insightful perspective on the cultural predicament of human beings within the natural order of things.

III. A READING FOR THE SECOND STORY

A very different conception of the cultural predicament of human beings underlies the second story. Unlike the first story, in this one human beings are placed at the center of God's Creation, as the creation of man comes before that of all other living creatures or even of vegetation, placing him in this way at the very heart of the narrative. Moreover, when animals are finally created by God, they are brought before man to see what he will call them, and his decision on this is final. One implication from this turn of events is that the division of creatures into different kinds is oriented on a human perspective. Another is that without man there would be no point to the rest of Creation; or, as it is explained in the case of plants, "without man there is no one to work the land." The reason thus given and the ordering of Creation in this way around man provide for a *domesticated* perspective on *both* human life and Creation. It is as though both were being reflected upon from an *agrarian* point of view. This way of contemplating things is vividly exemplified in the story by telling how, following man's creation, God surrounds him with a *garden*. A garden is not a raw and wild piece of nature. It is a parcel of nature that has been subdued and domesticated.

Another telling difference between the two stories pertains to the way in which God creates. In the first story God creates by *generating things into being out of nothing*, and He does so by word of mouth, thereby turning words

into deeds. As mentioned earlier, the word used to describe this unique act of creation is *bara*. But in the second story, what God does is no longer described through the use of the verb *bara*, as generating things into being out of nothing. Rather, what God does is described through the use of the verb *yatzar*, which denotes a way of *constructing* things out of basic raw materials. Sometimes, as in the case of the creation of man and animals, this is done by *molding* them out of earth, and sometimes, as in the case of woman, by *fashioning* her out of man's rib. Sometimes, as in the case of vegetation, no act of creation is mentioned, only that of *planting*. The imagery and language used in this story are typical of those which are used to talk about *work*, mostly the kind of work which goes into agriculture and craftsmanship. The description given of the creation of the Garden of Eden, channelling the flow of water and planting trees and vegetation, draws upon the vocabulary used to talk about work that goes into *cultivating* land. The description given of the creation of both animal and human life is reminiscent of how a good craftsman goes about his work. It is not unlike a description of an artisan who fashions a vessel out of clay.

Another striking way in which this story differs from the first is that in it God does not bless human beings. Rather, He *commands* them to refrain from certain types of behavior and *permits* them to perform other types of behavior: namely, not to eat from the tree of knowledge about good and evil, and to eat from all the other trees in the garden. Given the way in which the nature and destiny of creatures are conjoined in the Bible and are given expression through God's blessing or curse, it would seem that human beings are created with a certain inherent deficiency: they are not endowed by their creator with any particular, inner, self-activating (human) nature, for the blessing (or curse) that God eventually bestows on them and which fixes their destiny for all times comes only later, after they are driven out of the Garden of Eden. Instead, they are provided with an ability to obey commands. Now the ability to obey commands, follow rules, comply with regulations (just like its corollary, the ability to disobey commands, defy rules, evade regulations) is not an ability that is manifested in the behavior of wild creatures in nature. For it is an ability which is dependent on acknowledging authority, and it is manifested in a posture of *compliance* and in an attitude of *submission*. To act on command is to be tamed, just as to follow regulations is to be domesticated. Animals *in nature* do not live by command or regulations. They live by their basic *natures*. Given the fact that in this story human beings require no breaking-in period or training to obey God's command, it would seem that they are envisioned as having been created as *domesticated creatures* from the very start. In this conception the *inclination* to submit to authority is what forms an essential part of human nature—present even in the primeval existence in the Garden of Eden—just, apparently, as is the inclination to defy authority. It is they who are the subjugated creatures in this story. This description of the predisposition of human beings contrasts sharply with the description given in the first story, where the

prominent trait to come across is the possession and use of power for subjugating other creatures and for dominating the earth.

The Emergence of Ethical (Forms of) Life

In Christian theology it is common to interpret the story about the banishment of human beings from the Garden of Eden in connection with a “primordial sin” against God which, supposedly, brought about the “Fall of Man.” Nonetheless, in the context of the present discussion the “primordial sin” described in the story is the fall of human beings into a cultural predicament through the creation of *social norms* of behavior for themselves. The creation of such norms is the creation of what we, following the Greeks, are apt to call “ethical” (forms of) behavior. It is manifested in the story by the creation of certain self-inflicted strictures of dress, pertaining perhaps to norms regarding sexual behavior. Although in the story human beings attempt to cover themselves *after* they realize that they are naked, the two go together; for the concept of being naked makes sense only in a context where it makes sense to talk of being dressed. So that to realize that one is naked is an indication that one has a conception of what it is to be dressed. It is interesting to note that such norms of behavior emerge *prior* to the banishment of human beings from the Garden of Eden. It is also interesting to note that the description of the Garden of Eden, as a place of abundance and security, is contrasted with the description of the world outside, as a place of misery and hardships, where human beings have to toil and learn to use their wits and develop various skills and crafts to survive. Thus, in contrast with the first story, in this one practical skills and technological innovations arise only *after* the emergence of social norms. This view of the cultural predicament is a developmental one: basic social norms herald the emergence of a cultural predicament, and technological innovations and practical skills then arise to support a mode of existence in it.

One way of interpreting the story about human existence in the Garden of Eden is to read it as a description of what the philosophers of the Enlightenment referred to as a “state of nature.” On this reading the ascent of human beings from natural (forms of) life into cultural (forms of) life results from their eating of the tree of knowledge about good and evil, an act which enables them to create and adopt social norms of behavior. One difficulty with this reading of the text is that in the way in which existence in the Garden of Eden is described, it appears to be a somewhat *tamed* state of existence, rather than a wild state of nature. In answer it may be said that human existence in the Garden of Eden is described from the perspective given to human beings in such a state of nature. Lacking any social norms, they do not distinguish between wild, savage behavior and civilized behavior, and thus do not see it as unruly. Another difficulty with this reading of the story is that as human existence in the Garden

of Eden is described, it is not devoid of all norms of behavior. Since man is able to give names to animals in this state of existence, it seems that it already includes normative, linguistic practices. The cultural practices that are missing from this state of nature are *social norms* alongside various practical innovations and skills in agriculture, husbandry, craftsmanship, cooking, sewing clothes, constructing shelter and so forth, which in human (forms of) life often accompany these.⁹

Although in the Biblical story eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil results in the creation and adoption of social norms, there have been different ways of interpreting the significance of the symbolism embodied in both this tree and the act of eating from it. Martin Buber has argued that most of these interpretations divide into three different readings of what human beings gain thereby: namely, the acquisition of sexual desire, the acquisition of moral consciousness, and the acquisition of actual knowledge. In Buber's own view the knowledge of good and evil which is embodied in this tree is "awareness of the opposites inherent in all being within the world."¹⁰ In the way in which I read the story, eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil results in the creation and adoption of an ethical (form of) life which is manifested in the emergence of social norms of behavior. Thus, whatever knowledge is in this tree, it is the sort of knowledge that makes it possible to create and adopt such norms.

There is a way of reading the story about eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil which illuminates both what sort of knowledge is meant thereby, as well as how it promotes the creation and adoption of ethical (forms of) life through the emergence of social norms. In this reading the ability to create and adopt social norms is seen in the story to result from the acquisition by human beings of *deep sentiments* toward each other in the form of affection, respect, and concern that breed strong *emotional ties*. These sentiments supersede the kind of raw, sexual attraction that prevails between the sexes in nature, and it is they that underlie human, approved sexuality in cultural (forms of) life. In the Bible sexual intercourse between men and women is usually described as either lying with a woman or knowing her. It has been argued that the latter locution, as opposed to the former, is used predominantly (though not always) to signify a sexual act which is sanctioned on ethical grounds. A sexual act thus described embodies in it not only the discharge of lustful emotions, but also a strong emotional bond between the partners and the exchange of deep sentiments toward each other.¹¹ In this interpretation the act of eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil is a symbol for a sexual act in which a strong emotional bond is invoked between the man and the woman. The ability of human beings to experience such sentiments as part of their natural, sexual desire provides them with a richer and more committed emotional life to each other. Emergence of deeper sexual sentiments and stronger sexual ties between human beings than those typically found between the sexes in nature makes it

both possible and necessary to orient human (forms of) life toward ethical standards of behavior in the form of social norms. In this reading it is the advent of such stronger and richer emotional ties between the sexes, rather than the growth of their intellect and their ability to reason, that precipitates the emergence of normative, social practices among human beings and enables them to ascent from natural (forms of) life into cultural (forms of) life.

The Emergence of Self-Consciousness

One way or another, the ascent of human beings from natural (forms of) life into cultural (forms of) life is symbolized in the story by the emergence of ethical (forms of) life which is exemplified through the creation and adoption of social norms regarding nakedness. A philosophically attractive way of interpreting the connection made thereby between the emergence of social norms and awareness of being naked is to read it as a symbolic illustration for the appearance of *self-consciousness*. In this reading human beings are not banished from the Garden of Eden as much as they emerge out of it, and they do so by attaining self-consciousness through the realization that they are naked. There is an intrinsic but complicated relationship between self-consciousness and the culture-nature distinction. The intrinsic part is that self-consciousness seems to be a form of consciousness which is inherently related to cultural (forms of) life underlaid by social norms, as it is not clear what would count as self-conscious behavior in the kind of uninhibited (forms of) life given to wild animals in nature. The complication stems from the fact that self-consciousness can be looked upon as either a psychological phenomenon which *results from* the emergence and adoption of normative practices or as one which functions to *bolster them up* and render them accessible to humans. One way or the other, in seeking to cover themselves with clothing, human beings demonstrate an ability to operate with the culture-nature distinction, which is symbolized in this case by distinguishing between being clothed and naked. By creating and adopting social norms of behavior, they also demonstrate that they have chosen the cultural side of the equation over the natural side. Lastly, they demonstrate both through their shame and their subsequent behavior that they are well aware of their affiliation with the natural species and thus of their true nature, which they try to hide behind the clothes they devise for themselves and put on. By both doing and realizing all this they emerge out of natural (forms of) life into cultural (forms of) life.

It is common to read this part of the story as though eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil produces self-consciousness that is expressed in the form of *shame*. In this way both the emergence of self-consciousness and the emergence of human beings into cultural (forms of) life are accounted for through the phenomenon of shame. This is a very suggestive reading, but it

also poses a number of difficulties. One difficulty is that the story does not *actually say* that eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil brings about shame.¹² Another difficulty is that the Hebrew word used to describe how human beings reacted to their being naked prior to eating from the tree of knowledge—*yitboshasho*—can be translated as either feeling ashamed, embarrassed, shy, or bashful, which leaves it open which of these modes of self-consciousness is actually meant. Unlike fear or anger, all of these are feelings manifesting forms of self-consciousness expressed as *social inhibitions* regarding public exposure. Shame and perhaps also embarrassment are akin to guilt, however, in that they are forms of self-consciousness which arise in response to a self-inflicted judgement about one's *transgressions*, in the context of *standards* of behavior regarding how one *should* (or should not) behave. Unlike shyness, they are forms of self-consciousness which are intrinsically related to awareness of oneself in the context of *social norms* of behavior. The difficulty incurred when trying to conceive of natural creatures as feeling either shame or guilt is that it involves thinking of them as succumbing to feelings which result from awareness of transgressions on their part against norms which provide standards of behavior in a social context.

This suggests two possible readings of the story about shame in connection with the relationship between culture and nature. In one reading, shame is an emotion that underlies both the creation and the acquisition of social norms. This reading of the story may be supported by noting the role that the phenomenon of shame plays in domesticating cultured beings. When growing into a culture and learning to adopt its ways, we first learn to participate in such basic cultural practices as sitting in a certain posture, walking, grasping and handling things, using a language, as well as various strictures regarding ways of eating, dressing, and cleanliness. It is only *after* we have learned to participate in such basic, normative practices, and only when we are further introduced into the demanding ways of *social conventions* regarding *human interactions*—what psychologists refer to as “*socialization*”—that we acquire the propensity to feel ashamed for mismanaging normative ways of behavior or transgressing against them. Shame is a social emotion. But it can spread through the soul so as to implicate all normative ways of behavior. By functioning as an emotion which afflicts human beings with self-induced inhibitions, it tames them and hinders them from transgressing against acquired norms. In so doing it chains them to their culture. It is thus an emotion which functions to support tradition, as it turns cultured beings who succumb to it into *docile, conformative beings*, rather than the creators of new ways of behavior.

Linking shame to awareness of transgressions against normative ways of behavior suggests another way of accounting for the place of shame in the narrative. It is to read it as telling about how *understanding* of the normative nature of cultural behavior comes about, rather than how this form of behavior itself comes about. In this reading, cultured beings are initiated into normative

patterns of behavior by a kind of free-wheeling, carefree childish play in which they engage with their surroundings and their elders. This is how they learn the basic cultural practices of sitting, walking, grasping things, eating, and talking. Nonetheless, in so doing they are acquiring rudiments of normative behavior, by learning to submit to the *personal authority* of their educators. Later, as submission to personal authority matures into *social conformity*, they discover that they have been chained to a form of behavior which they can no longer shake off without feeling ashamed. Shame, it may be said, is a very rudimentary way in which the sway of normative patterns of behavior is felt and reflected in the human soul as self-consciousness. It is a way of *acknowledging* the power and authority of norms by means of emotions and, thus, a very basic way through which *understanding of the normative nature* of cultural practices is manifested.

Hegel and Freud on Self-Consciousness

One suggestive way of reading the text in these ways may be enhanced through Hegel's discussion of the emergence of both self-consciousness and social norms.¹³ In Hegel's discussion the idea of subjugation and domination, which in the first story of the Biblical narrative is used in a symbolic way to represent how human beings relate to nature, is used with a literal, political, and social connotation to describe the basic way in which human beings relate to one another. In this manner domination and subjugation become a basic form of human interaction out of which self-consciousness emerges into being and social norms come into existence. The idea is that when human beings allow themselves to be subjugated and dominated by others, they place themselves in a subordinate relationship of bondage to others and elevate those others to a stature of lordship. It is out of this relationship of subordination which is established between human beings and in the context of the desire of some to subjugate and the willingness of others to submit, that *social norms* emerge into being and are reflected in forms of self-consciousness. Once this happens, the way is also open for overcoming social inhibitions through revolutionary acts of transgression. In this view cultural self-creation and domestication are modes of existence which are dialectically related to one another, providing together for the onward, spiritual, epic movement of cultures.

Another, curiously similar, way of reading the second Biblical story in connection with the emergence of self-consciousness in the context of social norms derives from Freudian psychoanalysis. In this reading, the story of life in the Garden of Eden and subsequent banishment from it provides a symbolic account in which both the ontogenetic and phylogenetic development of human beings from natural creatures into cultural beings is entertained and represented. As an ontogenetic account it tells how we come into the world as

creatures of nature who live only by desire; how, when trying to rebel against the strictures of behavior laid down for us in the form of social norms, we incur the wrath of our fathers; how we learn the meaning of authority and norms through feelings of guilt and shame which arise in us when we transgress against them; how, fearing the loss of love from our parents, we learn to repress our natural desires (creating in this way the very unconsciousness in which they are submerged) and to sublimate them through refined cultural behavior; how in doing all this we are banished, never to return again, from what was for us a Garden of Eden: a mode of pleasurable existence, not weighted down by the social norms which are incarnated in the emergence of a superego. As a phylogenetic account, the story is seen to provide a symbolic narrative which tells about the emergence of normative practices in human communities as a byproduct of the shame and guilt incurred from overthrowing the rule of the primordial tribal-father-leader, which in this story is none other than God.¹⁴

The Wonder of Culture

Unlike the natural, power-oriented description of human life given in the first story, there is a dreamlike quality to the story about human beings and their doings in the Garden of Eden. They seem to lead an enchanted life there, surrounded by magical trees, encountering extraordinary creatures with which they converse, partaking in a supernatural turn of events, leading to a confrontation with God and to being cast out. It is very tempting, therefore, to read the story about eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge and the subsequent banishment from the Garden of Eden as a *magical* narrative which undertakes to provide a *supernatural account* of the emergence of humanly created cultural (forms of) life out of God-created natural (forms of) life. In this reading, the magical, supernatural powers inherent in the tree of knowledge about good and evil are symbols which stand for what is perceived through this story as the *non-natural* forces embodied in the very concept of cultural norms—pertaining to right and wrong—out of which social customs and conventions are made possible.¹⁵ In creating them human beings shed off their submissive behavior and take on a creative role—not entirely unlike that of God, in that they create norms of behavior out of nothing. Their achievement in transcending the order of things created by God through the creation and adoption of normative patterns of behavior is perceived herein to be such a stupendous event that it merits a magical, supernatural account. In this way the problem of how *the very concept of normative behavior* could have been envisioned prior to there being any norms is solved. Human beings create it *unintentionally!* By eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge, human beings are able to use the supernatural power of creation that God possesses so as to unintentionally create for themselves a non-natural predicament in the form of normative ways of life.

One difficulty with this way of reading the story is that it tends to overlook the fact that eating from the tree of knowledge is an act of *defiance* on the part of human beings. It shows that they have already cast off their God-created roles of *domesticated* creatures. To defy the Creator already places human beings in a non-natural, self-creating predicament. Another difficulty is that from the events narrated in the story, it seems to be an act of self-creation which they are *lured* into perpetrating through their God-given (natural) passions, curiosity, and cunning (which the snake symbolizes). It would seem that something in the very nature of human beings, as they were created by God, disposes them to this way of acting. Whether God intended them to revolutionize their initial state of existence from the very start and to recreate themselves, or whether this form of recreation is a revolutionary act of defiance on their part against their Creator, it symbolizes the way in which human beings become the cultured creatures that they are through their own doing.

A more *naturalized* way of interpreting the magical feature of the narrative is to see in it a symbolic representation for an *expression of awe* at the emergence of normative, cultural (forms of) life. In this reading, the story about the tree of knowledge and the expulsion from the Garden of Eden is a symbolic narrative from within which the enormity of the transformation of human beings from natural creatures into cultural, self-conscious, rule-creating and rule-following beings is expressed and contemplated. It is a way of reflecting on this transformation from an *attitude of wonder*, as a kind of awesome transformation, providing for an *ontological metamorphosis*. The concept of metamorphosis is a concept of *wondrous becoming*. It pertains to transformations that regularly take place in nature and through which beings lose one identity and acquire another, transformations which are awe inspiring when perceived from an attitude of wonder. It is a concept of *natural change* that belongs to a concept of nature that is prior to that which we acquire either through science or metaphysics. Metamorphoses are transformations which are still perceived as "the miracles of nature": the blossom opening in early morning, the transformation at dawn of night into daylight, the acorn which sprouts and becomes a huge tree, the hot summer which turns into cold winter, the wild child who grows into a rule-following, cultured being, fresh youth that becomes wrinkled old age, life that is turned into death. All these are natural changes which, when viewed from a perspective of wonder, may be perceived as instances of metamorphosis. To perceive natural change from this perspective is to perceive the miraculous not as something which contrasts with the course of nature, but as something which is an integral part of it.

In this reading of the story, *the wonder of becoming* that is expressed through it is a wonder at the *emergence of cultural (forms of) life out of natural (forms of) life*: a metamorphosis of human beings *from created creatures into self-creating ones*. In this insight the transformation of human beings from natural creatures into cultural beings is seen to be such a stupendous event that

it is likened to utilizing the instruments of the Creator himself to recreate themselves. Such an act of recreation on the part of human beings affiliates them with the Creator even as they transgress against him, as it turns them into creators in their own right, i.e., the creators of human cultures. In overcoming nature in this way they become the *self-creating*, cultural beings that they are.

IV. TWO ALTERNATIVE CONCEPTIONS OF THE CULTURAL PREDICAMENT

The two stories about human beings set out in this Biblical narrative provide for two fundamentally different philosophical conceptions of the cultural predicament and its relationship to nature described as God's Creation. When looking at what joins these different conceptions together, three philosophically prominent features stand out. The first is that they both seek to provide insight into the cultural predicament of human beings by distinguishing it in one way or another from a noncultural predicament of all other created beings. The second is that both conceptions draw a resemblance between human beings and God: the first through the symbols of subjugation and domination and the second through that of (self-) creation. The third is that, although different, both conceptions of the cultural predicament of human beings are included in this narrative.

In summarizing the differences between these two conceptions of the cultural predicament of human beings, it may be said that the first focuses on the ability of human beings to master their environment, whereas the second focuses on their ability to both adopt and create social norms of behavior for themselves, i.e., on technological skills and ethical practices, respectively. Indeed, it is by focusing in this way on different aspects of human life which provide for the cultural predicament that two different conceptions of it emerge through the symbols of subjugation and self-creation. As the first is a power-oriented conception of culture, it describes culture in reference to a God-given, innate ability to master other beings and to control parts of the environment. The distinction between what we call "culture and nature" is exemplified in this conception between two different postures in a power relationship of domination. Thus human beings within their cultural predicament and God who is devoid of any such predicament are both characterized as standing in a similar power relationship to created beings. It is tempting to look upon this conception of the cultural predicament of human beings as somewhat naive, as a conception that is not yet attuned to differences between the *normative* behavior that human beings engage in when following the practices and customs of their culture and the *causal* interactions between things and power relationship between creatures that take place in nature. It may also seem naive in that it is not attuned to the fact that skills need to be developed and technological innova-

tions need to be discovered, all of which have then to be passed on from one generation to another through training and education. Hence, they too are normative in nature, and they too emerge within rule-following practices which provide for a cultural tradition. But then it is also possible to look upon it as a very insightful conception, one in which the concepts of subjugation and domination symbolize the ability of human beings to overcome their natural plight by shaping and transforming their environment into a cultural habitat.

The second conception provides insight into the cultural predicament by focussing on the way a culture operates inward, on the beings who partake in it. It suggests that this is done by providing its participants with ethical standards in the form of social norms which determine behavior through *self-consciousness*. It also suggests that the way a culture operates inward, on the beings who participate in it, is a way of determining behavior that goes against the grain of (God's) Creation, as it determines the behavior of beings in a completely different manner from that allotted to them by their initial creator. As such it is likened both to a form of transgression against God, and to a way of emulating God as a creator. The insight which underlies this way of looking at the matter is that the creation of a cultural predicament is a form of *self-creation*, which is both an act of revolt on the part of human beings and an act of self-chaining.¹⁶ It is a revolt against the rule of God set out in the ways of Creation (which we call "nature"), and it is the self-creation of the rule of human beings through the emergence of *normative practices* (which underlie what we call "culture"). Both come about by creating the concepts of right and wrong which are given life in cultural customs and practices, and the emergence of both is symbolized by the act of eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge about good and evil. Given this phylogenetic reading of the text, human beings can be seen to emerge out of a (natural) state of existence created for them by God into (a cultural) one that is all their own doing by the creation and adoption of normative practices, conventions, and customs. In so doing they *recreate* themselves—this time in their own image.

Reflecting on the cultural predicament from this conception tends to focus attention on the way humans create in contrast with the way God creates. For, of course, the way in which a cultural predicament is created by human beings is not the same way in which the natural predicament for all beings is created by God. The creation of a culture by human beings is first of all the creation of a cultural predicament for *themselves*. In the conception of God which is drawn in this Biblical narrative, God stands in an external relationship to His creation. Human beings stand in an internal relationship to the social norms, conventions, shared habits, linguistic rules, practical skills, common judgements, refined practices of art, rituals, and technological achievements which underlie their cultures and which they both create and observe. Unlike the creation of nature by God, the creation of cultural practices by human beings is always a form of *self-creation*.¹⁷ Human beings transform themselves from created, natu-

ral creatures into self-creating, cultural ones by doing things which act upon themselves so as to reshape themselves. For the *creation* of cultural ways of behavior by human beings is always also the *adoption* of cultural ways of behavior by human beings.

As noted before, both conceptions differentiate between the cultural predicament of human beings and the natural predicament of all creatures. In both of them the cultural mode of existence which is unique to human beings brings out a certain resemblance between them and God: in the first conception through God's own action, as when humans are created by God in His own image, so that they can subjugate all other creatures and dominate the earth; in the second conception through the attempt of human beings to emulate God, by eating from the tree of knowledge about good and evil created by God and forbidden to them, and then proceeding to recreate themselves by the creation and adoption of social norms. Either way, the association with God (coupled with the powerful symbolism invoked by these stories about self-creation and domination) provides for profound philosophical insights into the ways in which, through their cultural predicament, human beings are set apart from all other created creatures. In so doing this narrative in both its stories functions so as to articulate and enhance a perceived *difference between two modes of being*, which we today refer to as "culture and nature."

The Virtues of Diversity

As mentioned earlier, there have been various philosophical attempts to connect these stories into a single, unified narrative. Nonetheless, it is worth reflecting on the fact that the Bible does not commit itself to a single perspective on the cultural predicament of human beings, as it offers two *different* stories about it and, hence, two different insights into it. Indeed, other than the fact that these stories exhibit a complete disregard for each other, the most noteworthy feature about them is that they are both included in this narrative, as though to drive home the point that neither suffices on its own to elucidate the cultural predicament of human beings.

To describe the cultural predicament of human beings merely in the context of their ability to dominate all other creatures and their surroundings is of course to offer a very partial and even impoverished description of culture. It is to offer an insight into the cultural predicament which completely disregards the differences between the lives of human beings within a culture from those of animals in nature, as it disregards the way in which a culture molds the lives of those who partake in it by domesticating them. (Indeed it may be said that the creatures who are dominated the most by a culture are the human beings who partake in it.) Yet even as it does so, this neglect on the part of the narrative does not fault it. For it is precisely by disregarding all other aspects in

the cultural predicament of human beings and focusing on this aspect alone that this narrative acquires its forceful perspective and manages to bring an important insight into sharp focus, even if it misses much else that is also true. Being *only a symbolic story* the deficiency is not deplorable. Other stories about the human predicament in a culture can be told as well, for it is in the nature of a symbolic narrative that it does not set out to exhaust its subject but merely to *display* insightful aspects of it. Thus a completely different story is told when the cultural predicament is contemplated by reflecting on how it affects the beings who partake in it and who are immersed in its normative practices. Yet even here the story does not go so far as to articulate the difference perceived between what we call “culture and nature” into *a metaphysical difference in kind*, as it does not try to explain it by recourse to some abstract, metaphysical principle of being. Being only a story, it merely reveals and underlines the importance of a difference thus perceived between natural and cultural (forms of) life by providing it with a profound and highly suggestive symbolic representation.

V. SYMBOLIC NARRATIVES AND PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION

All this said, the claim that the Biblical narrative under consideration harbors in it *profound philosophical insights* may still be met with incredulity. For even if judged to be philosophical, it may seem to many today to provide a very rudimentary effort in this direction. I believe that there are two main reasons for not seeing in this narrative (as well as in other symbolic narratives) a valid *philosophical* discourse which can harbor in it profound insights. Both have to do with the nature of symbolic narratives and with the method employed in them to bring insight. Symbolic narratives, even when they strive to articulate a philosophical point of view, do so in a *figurative* and very oblique fashion, by telling a fanciful story. They are forms of discourse in which the division which Plato strove to enhance between poetry and philosophy, and which today underlies the philosophical discourse in the West, is not maintained. Rather than communicate their insights through abstract claims which are backed by reasoned arguments, such narratives rely on striking imagery and fanciful stories to express their philosophical insights. In so doing they appear to us to speak not with the “pure” voice of reason which philosophy cherishes but with that of the imagination. The second reason is that this narrative does not offer any metaphysical claims about the cultural predicament, as its insights are not formulated in reference to any fundamental principles of being. Instead of trying to explicate the essence of the cultural predicament by recourse to some *fundamental principle of being*, it seeks to *display a particular aspect*, providing in this way concrete and insightful perspective on it. In both its striving for this goal and in the method used to attain it, this form of discourse

is alien to the way in which philosophy has evolved in the West in the form of metaphysics.

And yet, given the dissatisfaction voiced in our time with metaphysics as an attempt to propound fundamental explanations, it may be worth while to reappraise the merits of the symbolic narrative as a way of both articulating and gaining philosophical insight. For the nice thing about symbolic narratives is that, unlike metaphysical explanations, they are not committed to telling the *whole* truth. They bring insight by *displaying* truth, and that from a very particular, tangible, and, therefore, *limited* perspective. They promote understanding by providing insightful descriptions into a philosophically perplexing issue, not unlike the way in which a good simile, a striking metaphor, or an entertaining parable provide understanding. They *demonstrate*, rather than explain, what something is like, and they do so as all good demonstrations do, by using an insightful example to focus our attention on a *particular aspect*, enabling us to gain through it a unique and illuminating perspective on the matter at hand. In so doing, they further understanding in a way in which metaphysical claims, which aim to capture all of the truth through a fundamental explanation, do not. Not trying to exhaust the truth about the cultural predicament, an insight articulated in this way is only one among many possible insights. Symbolic narratives do not commit those who are swayed by them to a *single conception* of the matter. Before they are turned into religious dogma, symbolic narratives provide for a tolerant form of philosophical discourse which allows different stories, and thereby also different conceptions, as well as different interpretations, to reside by each other. And yet, being *symbolic* narratives, and as such stories which aim to articulate important insights, they are not merely entertaining stories, just as parables are not merely entertaining stories. For although not exhaustive of their subject matter, they express an important and *general* point of view.

Nonetheless, it seems that despite all its charm and insights, for most of us today this form of discourse no longer provides a viable avenue for reflective, *philosophical* insight about the cultural predicament of human beings. The fact of the matter is that most of us can no longer return without any intellectual embarrassment to reflect on the cultural predicament by way of either of these stories. The difficulty incurred in this connection does not derive merely from the fact that they provide us with a God-oriented perspective on culture and nature, for the concepts of self-creation and domination, used in this narrative to bring insight into the nature of social norms and technological skills, have merit in their own rights. Nor does it derive from the fact that the perception of wonder at the existence of cultural (forms of) life alongside natural (forms of) life no longer confounds our thinking. For it may be argued that what we apprehend through metaphysics, as a *difference in kind* between the normative behavior which underlies cultural (forms of) life and the causal interactions which underlie natural (forms of) life, is no more than a metaphysical way of giving expression to this very same perception of wonder.

Our difficulty in all this is one of form, not content. It is one of using a symbolic narrative, of whatever content, as a form of discourse for philosophical reflection. The fact is that most of us are no longer able to pursue our craving for *philosophical insight* by means of symbolic thinking, such as is given in mythical stories and allegories, regardless of their content. We are not able to do so any longer for the same reason that we are no longer able to find intellectual comfort by creating new ones. The difficulty we incur in this connection is symptomatic of fundamental changes that have taken place in the human spirit through the years, and as a result of which no amount of interpretation of these narratives can recharge them with life *for philosophy*, as they seem to have outrun their usefulness in providing *philosophical insight* for reflective human beings in our day. For despite all criticisms and disappointments, we are not really content in philosophy with anything less than what initially metaphysical explanations held in promise for us. Having tasted of their powerful brew, our philosophical craving for insight will no longer be satisfied by anything less, as we want to gain insight and achieve understanding through a *fundamental and comprehensive explanation into the essence of the matter*. It is worth remembering, therefore, that once, when we were willing to settle for less than what metaphysical explanations hold in promise for us, important philosophical insights were still gained.¹⁸

NOTES

1. Claude Lévi-Strauss has claimed that the contrast expressed and perceived through these concepts underlies all cultural (forms of) life. As I shall show, such a claim requires various qualifications, since we have inherited several but different distinctions in this context.

2. The Hebrew word used today for culture, *tarbut*, is used in the Bible to mean the majority of a people. The Hebrew word used today for nature, *teva*, does not occur as such in the Bible.

3. A metaphoric use of this verb pertains to creating things out of sheer imagination.

4. The word used in Hebrew, *Brashit*, connotes a beginning to which nothing is prior. It is the first word in the Bible, and like the word which follows it, *bara*, has no equivalent in English.

5. There is a tendency to confuse symbolic narratives with coded messages. This is a mistake. Coded messages require decoding before they can be understood. Symbolic narratives can be understood without interpretation. What the interpretation of symbolic narratives brings with it is a deeper understanding of them.

6. The term used in Hebrew, *zelem*, may mean shadow, shape, or figure.

7. There is a tradition of interpreting the text here according to which it was only after the deluge that human beings began to eat meat. If accepted, it would be wrong to describe them at this stage as hunters.

8. See Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, trans. S. Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), part 1, chap. 2. Maimonides, of course, was not the first Jewish scholar to interpret the Biblical stories of creation by way of Greek philosophy. Philo of Alexandria preceded him, when he explained that creation took place in two stages. In the first the intelligible world—corresponding to the Platonic *logos*—was created. In the second stage the visible world was created. An altogether different tradition of interpretation of the stories of creation unfolds from Jewish mysticism.

9. The state of nature described in Hobbes's *Leviathan* resembles the description given in the Bible of the Garden of Eden, in that both are states of existence lacking social norms. Hobbes also

describes it as a state of war between human beings and of overall misery, however. Rousseau's description of human existence in a state of nature in *The Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* resembles the Biblical description, save for the issue of language. He describes human beings in this state as wandering up and down the forests, without industry, speech, and home, strangers to war and to all ties. Locke, in his *Essay Concerning the True Origin, Extent, and End of Civil Government*, describes this state as including in it both linguistic and social norms.

10. See Martin Buber, "The Tree of Knowledge," in *On The Bible*, ed. N. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), pp. 18–21.

11. Indeed, immediately following their dismissal from the Garden of Eden, human beings engage in sexual intercourse which is described as a form of knowing. It is here that for the first time the woman is referred to by her name, suggesting perhaps a more personal bond between them than that which exists in a state of nature.

12. Earlier in the text it is said that although man and woman were naked, they were not ashamed, so this reading seems reasonable.

13. See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 111–19.

14. For examples of an ontogenetic account see Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on Sexuality*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7, trans. J. Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1963); also "The Sexual Life of Human Beings" and "The Development of the Libido and the Sexual Organizations," in *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, vol. 16. For examples of a phylogenetic account see *Totem and Taboo*, vol.13, and *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

15. One difficulty with such an account is in seeing how cultural conventions can derive from a supernatural being who is outside the realm of any particular culture.

16. The relationship between cultural self-creation through revolt has been noted in many different traditions: e.g., in Jewish mysticism of *Kabbala*, in Hegelian dialectics, and, lastly, in Kuhn's account of revolutions in science.

17. It does not follow that a culture is always conceived as a human creation. The original title for *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* suggested that it sets out principles concerning the natural law of *Gentile nations*, inasmuch as the cultural rules on which the Hebrew nation was founded were given by God.

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