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Paradise Established

The Foundation of Kosmos versus Chaos according to Genesis 1–3

1 The Unity of Two Creation Accounts

Biblical scholars are in agreement that the book of Genesis opens with two different reports of how the world was created. Ever since Jean Astruc published his *Conjectures* in 1753, the source-critical distinction between Gen 1:1–2:4a and Gen 2:4b–3:24 has come to be first gradually and then generally accepted.[1] In the 19th century, scholars were concerned to establish which of the two versions was the older, and it was almost a kind of second revolution when it turned out that the first report was the younger.[2] Today, this is the common opinion, though that does not mean that all debate has ceased.

This consensus makes it easy to forget that for most of its history the first three chapters of the bible were read as parts of a coherent report. The redactors who created the current order held the same view when they combined the two sources into a single account.[3] The two reports are joined by the linking verse Gen 2:4b: "In the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens." For its content, this circumstantial clause relies on the first creation account, since only that one is explicitly concerned with the creation of earth and heavens. Syntactically, however, the clause belongs to the following text, with which it also

1 Cf. Jean Astruc, *Conjectures sur les memoires origineaux dont il paroit que Moyse s'est servi pour composer le livre de la Genese* (Brussels: Fricx, 1753), 25–38.

2 This was the consequence of the so-called "Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen-hypothesis," based on Karl Heinrich Graf, *Die geschichtlichen Bücher des Alten Testaments: Zwei historisch-kritische Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Weigel, 1866); Abraham Kuenen, *De godsdienst van Israël tot den ondergang van den Joodschen Staat* (Haarlem: Kruseman, 1869–1870); Julius Wellhausen, *Geschichte Israels. In zwei Bänden*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Reimer, 1878); English translation of the 2nd edition (1883): *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan R. Menzies (Edinburgh: Black, 1885).

3 Regarding the intention of the editors cf. Herbert Donner, "Der Redaktor: Überlegungen zum vorkritischen Umgang mit der Heiligen Schrift," *Henoch* 2 (1980): 1–29. For the technique of the composition cf. Christoph Levin, "Die Redaktion R^{JP} in der Urgeschichte," in *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung* (Berlin and Boston, Mass.: De Gruyter, 2013): 59–79.

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shares the combined name of God *Yhwh ʾælohîm*, which has always been the most noticeable difference between the two accounts. The relative dating given applies to the second report. It is placed in a temporal relation to the first, namely that of concurrence. The line “In the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens” means that the events of the second account unfurled at the same time as the first account. From the very beginning, one thus finds the same solution devout readers of the bible continue to adduce in response to the problem that the bible contains two consecutive creation accounts: both are part of a single account – only the viewpoint has changed.

In this view, Gen 1 describes the framework of creation as a whole, while Gen 2 adds a number of particulars. This interpretation is so palatable also because there are almost no overlaps in content between the two accounts. Only two real repetitions stand out: The creation of man is reported in both 1:27 and 2:7, the creation of land animals in both 1:25 and 2:19. But these could be resolved: The sentence in 2:7b “Thus man became a living being” is an elaborating comment and résumé that uses *næfæš ḥayyāh* “living being” to refer back to the first account where this term is frequent (1:20, 21, 24, 30). On this reading, 1:27 reports that man was created “in the image of God”, while 2:7a adds how God did this in practice: “Yahweh God formed man from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.”

In the case of the creation of animals, the link is created by their naming: In the first account, the act of naming is part of the pattern of creation for the first three acts: day, night, heavens, land and sea are all given their names. For the other works of creation, this element is absent. In 2:20 the second account reports that man named the animals God gave to him. A remark in 2:19b relates these two things to one another, as is visible in the emphasis on the fact that this time man is the one giving the names: “and whatever *the man* called every living being (*næfæš ḥayyāh*) that was its name.” These editorial additions in 2:4b, 7b and 19b allowed the second account to be read as a continuation of the first.

If we read the two creation accounts as a unit, we immediately notice what is common to both of them: the central and completely uncontested role of the One and Only God. In Gen 1 this god creates the world through his command without any kind of counterpart coming into play, and also in Gen 2 he is the only subject. Unchallenged, he puts his works into action as both potter and gardener. This focus on the One God connects the two biblical accounts all the more, in that it serves to set them apart from most of the creation myths current in the

cultural and religious environs of Israel.[4] These generally reflect the contradictory experiences of the world familiar to us all, by having competing supernatural forces that can, with some simplification, be broken down to an antagonistic relationship between cosmos and chaos. If the cosmos is created by the One and Only God, however, the chaotic *status quo ante* that necessarily must have existed becomes something intangible. The almost monotheistic perspective we encounter in the biblical creation accounts is undoubtedly of later date. Though this does not preclude the existence of traditional models, the search for them thus has to operate within narrow confines.

2 The Original Shape of the Account Gen 1:1–2:4a

Recently, it has become common again to read Gen 1 as well as Gen 2–3 as essentially coherent texts. The obvious irregularities are explained by pointing to the tradition used by the authors.[5] This is a severe misunderstanding. It demonstrably overestimates the capabilities of human memory and neglects the genre of these texts, large parts of which are of an interpretive nature. While one must agree with Hermann Gunkel that "The world is not constituted only of people who write books and who copy them,"[6] the scriptorium of the Temple of Jerusalem in the Persian and Hellenistic era, where the biblical texts were curated and at least in part created, was a truly literary world indeed.[7]

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4 The most famous example is the late-Babylonian Epic of Creation *Enūma Elish*. The cuneiform text was edited by Wilfred G. Lambert and Simon B. Parker, *Enuma Eliš: The Babylonian Epic of Creation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966). English translation by Benjamin R. Foster in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 1, *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger (Leiden: Brill, 1997): 390–402.

5 Thus among many others the most recent commentary in German by Jan Christian Gertz, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis: Die Urgeschichte Gen 1–11* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 33 and 83.

6 Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: a Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, trans. K. William Whitney (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006), 306, n. 100 (trans. of *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1896], 58, n. 2).

7 For a more detailed source-critical analysis of Gen 1:1–2:4a cf. Christoph Levin, "Tatbericht und Wortbericht in der priesterschriftlichen Schöpfungserzählung," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 91 (1994): 115–133; repr. in *Fortschreibungen. Gesammelte Studien zum Alten Testament* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2003), 23–39.

Already in the late 18th century, modern biblical scholars recognized that the subdivision of the first creation account into six days was a later addition.[8] Although this observation was instigated by the argument that the establishment of the Jewish Sabbath did not fit the mythical narrative one suspected behind the creation account,[9] it was nevertheless accurate. The most obvious reason in its favour is that the creation of the cosmos consists of eight steps. Furthermore, the closing remark in 2:1 presupposes that the cosmos is complete with the creation of man: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." In 2:2, however, the act of creation ends only with God's rest on the seventh day. This incongruence already irritated ancient translators.[10] That the ordering of the world culminates in the Sabbath being established, or conversely, that the Sabbath is established to reflect on creation, is a profound and theologically logical thought, but it remains out of place here. Originally, the only temporal determination of the process lay in the very first word of the record: *bᵉreʾšît* "in the beginning." What is now squeezed into six days all happened simply "in the beginning."

Another literary level that we can identify is the act of creation being tied to the word of God. This motif is theologically extremely significant, as we can see, for instance, from the impact it had upon the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the word" (John 1:1). It is rooted in the experience that the prophets' message of doom came true with the conquest of Jerusalem.[11] The need to deal with this traumatic experience was what produced the insight that God's word is supremely powerful, which ultimately signifies nothing less than the comprehensive causality of God's word for all that happens in history as well as for all beings that exist in nature. As such, all the eight works of God in Gen 1 are

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8 The first to recognize this was Werner Carl Ludewig Ziegler, "Kritik über den Artikel von der Schöpfung nach unserer gewöhnlichen Dogmatik," in *Magazin für Religionsphilosophie, Exegese und Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 2, ed. Heinrich Philipp Conrad Henke (Helmstädt: Fleckeisen, 1794): 1–113, at 39–44.

9 For the history of biblical research in the last quarter of the 18th century cf. Christian Hartlich and Walter Sachs, *Der Ursprung des Mythosbegriffes in der modernen Bibelwissenschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1952). The contribution by Johann Philipp Gabler, "Einleitung zum ersten Theil der Urgeschichte," in Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Urgeschichte*, vol. 1, ed. Johann Philipp Gabler (Altdorf and Nürnberg: Monath and Kußler, ²1790), 1–136, was the most important.

10 Instead of the seventh day in the Masoretic Text of 2:2 the Greek translation and the Samaritan Pentateuch read: "On the *sixth* day God finished the work that he had done."

11 For the origin of the term *dᵉbar Yhwh* "word of Yahweh" in the history of Old Testament theology see Christoph Levin, "Das Wort Jahwes an Jeremia: Zur ältesten Redaktion der jeremianischen Sammlung," in *Verheißung und Rechtfertigung* (above note 3), 216–241. The origin of the term can be traced back to the editing of the prophetic books from the 6th century onwards.

prefaced with God's command: "Let there be" (or similar). All of existence obeys this command with its being: "And it was so." This relationship of command and obedience simultaneously establishes a norm: As everything that exists obeys God's mandate with its being one can say "that it was good."

The triad of command, execution and sanction is not always complete however. The sixth work, the creation of fish and birds, lacks the execution clause "And it was so."[12] In the case of man, the execution clause appears only right at the end and refers less to the act of creation than to the benediction (V. 28–30). The sanction "God saw that it was good" is missing when the heavens are created. And after the creation of man, it is applied to creation as a whole (V. 31). Already the ancient textual tradition attempted to mend these inconsistencies. More serious, however, is that God himself executes the commands he gives. The scheme of command and execution only makes sense when the waters are gathered in order to let the land appear (V. 9), and when the plant life is being created: "God said: Let the earth put forth vegetation.[13] [...] And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation" (V. 11–12). In all other cases, God himself is the agent. Strictly speaking, the command should thus be a self-encouraging cohortative, which indeed occurs on one single occasion, namely when man is created: "Let us make man in our image. [...] And God created man in his image" (V. 26–27). In addition, the details of command and deed do not always agree. In the case of the first work, for instance, God separates light from darkness, but the command concerns the creation of light.

If we remove all statements that add the creation by God's word to the account, we are left with the following original form:

> (1:1) In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. (2) The earth was without form and void. [...] (4b) Then God separated the light from the darkness. (5) And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. [...] (7) And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. [...] (8) And God called the firmament Heaven. [...] (9*)[14] And the waters under the heavens were gathered together into its places, and the dry land appeared. (10) God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. [...] (12) The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. [...]

12 It was added only later by the Greek translation or its *Vorlage*.
13 In a rather strange way this form of the command was also used for the creation of the animals of the land: "Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind" (V. 24). Contrary to this command, in V. 25 it is God who created the animals.
14 This following sentence is transmitted only by the Greek translation. From its style we can see that is relates to a Hebrew *Vorlage*. It has been lost because the execution clause "And it was so" apparently made it superfluous.

> (16) And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. (17) And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth. [...] (21) And God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. [...] (25) And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. [...] (27) And God created man in his image. [...] (2:1) Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

It is very likely that this account existed as a written source that the author of the Priestly writing – thus the conventional name for the Pentateuchal source the chapter belongs to – used when he was adding in his theology of the word.

This account presents a remarkably rational theory of the evolution of the world that only slightly differs from modern theories, mostly in that the One God is considered the ultimate cause of all being. Julius Wellhausen has described the sequence of evolution presented here:

> The primal stuff contains in itself all beings, as yet undistinguished: from it proceeds step by step the ordered world, by a process of unmixing [...] The chaotic primal gloom yields to the contrast of light and darkness; the primal water is separated by the vault of heaven into the heavenly water, out of which there grows the world above the firmament which is withdrawn from our gaze, and the water of the earth: the latter, a slimy mixture, is divided into land and sea, whereupon the land at once puts on its green attire. The elements thus brought into existence, light, heaven, water, land, are then enlivened, pretty much in the order in which they were created, with individual beings. [...] There is no doubt that [the author] means to describe the actual course of the genesis of the world, and to be true to nature in doing so; he means to give a cosmogonic theory. [...] He seeks to deduce things as they are from each other [...] Chaos being given, all the rest is spun out of it: all that follows is reflection, systematic construction; we can easily follow the calculation from point to point. [...] The arrangement of the things to be explained stands [...] for the explanation.[15]

One should only add that these creatures are not depicted as individuals, but as categories: Not the sun and the moon are made, but the two great lights, not wheat and fig trees, but plants yielding seed according to their kinds, trees bearing fruit according to their kind, living beings of the waters according to their kinds, and so forth. And finally God created man “in his image.”

15 Wellhausen, *Prolegomena* (above note 2), 297–299.

3 The Origin of Chaos

The emergent cosmos presupposes chaos – but purely as its material *conditio sine qua non*. This is evident already from the fact that the first sentence is occupied not by the *status quo ante*, but by a summary declaration: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." It is now mostly agreed that this much debated beginning is a self-sufficient main clause that offers a motto or a title. Besides linguistic evidence,[16] this is suggested especially by its correspondence to the concluding summary in 2:1: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them."

Only in 1:2, so in second place, do we find a reference to chaos as the condition before creation. However, it is neither described, nor granted any power of its own, with which the creator god would have to contend. August Dillmann observed: "One cannot deny that the author traces creation back only to its emergence from chaos, while presupposing chaos itself without saying anything as to its origin, either that it exists independently of God, or that it is established by God."[17] And Gerhard von Rad explained that the chaos is mentioned here because "unless one speaks of chaos, creation cannot be sufficiently considered at all."[18]

The *status quo ante* is described in 1:2: "The earth was without form and void (*tohû wābohû*). Darkness was upon the face of the deep (*tᵉhôm*). The Spirit of God (*rûaḥ ʾælohîm*) was hovering upon the face of the waters." These three sentences are of different origins. In the case of the third sentence, this is obvious since its closing phrase "upon the face of the waters" (*ʿal pᵉnê hammayim*) elaborates upon the second sentence's "upon the face of the deep" (*ʿal pᵉnê tᵉhôm*). Elsewhere, "God's spirit" or "Yahweh's spirit" refers to the power of creation (e. g., Ps 33:6; 104:30; Job 33:4).[19] This makes one wonder whether this later addition was intended to belong to the description of the chaotic pre-existence of the world; does it not in fact hint at the transition into creation? This applies also if one interprets the statement about the spirit in a solely meteorological

16 Cf. esp. Hermann-Josef Stipp, "Gen 1,1 und asyndetische Relativsätze im Bibelhebräischen," in *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Berlin and Boston, Mass.: De Gruyter, 2013), 3 – 40; idem, "Anfang und Ende: Nochmals zur Syntax von Gen 1,1," ibid., 41 – 51.

17 August Dillmann, *Die Genesis. Für die dritte Auflage nach August Knobel neu bearbeitet* (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1875), 20 (my translation).

18 Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia, Pa.: Westminster Press, 1961), 47.

19 In Exod 28:3; 31:3; 35:31 the craftsmen who are to build the tabernacle are skillful because they are filled with divine spirit (*rûaḥ ʾælohîm*).

sense. In this case it is reminiscent of the sinking of the *t^{e}hôm* after the deluge: “And God made a wind (*rûaḥ*) blow over the earth, and the waters subsided” (Gen 8:1). We may also associate the miracle at the sea: “Yahweh drove the sea back by a strong east wind (*b^{e}rûaḥ qādîm ʿazzāh*) all night, and turned the sea into dry land” (Exod 14:21). In any case, a biblical, exegetic interpretation is more plausible than the assumption that these statements are remnants of mythical ideas.

The same applies to the middle sentence that mentions the primal sea (*t^{e}hôm*). Although *t^{e}hôm* and Tiamat are etymologically related, *t^{e}hôm* cannot be explained as a loanword from the Akkadian. Thus it is unlikely that *t^{e}hôm* refers to the Babylonian sea goddess.[20] We can thus rule out that the description of the pre-existence of the world hints at a struggle against the personified sea, like the one that brings forth the cosmos in *Enūma Elish*. Rather, the linguistic parallels seem to indicate a northwest Semitic background. In the Old Testament, *t^{e}hôm* stands for the ocean, including the subterranean primordial ocean (e.g., Gen 49:25; Isa 51:10; Ps 104,6), and in dire situations it signifies a threatening deluge of water (e.g., Jonah 2:6; Ps 42:8; 77:17). In the Flood, chaos returns in that *t^{e}hôm* engulfs the earth (Gen 7:11). It seems to me that Gen 1:2 engages with precisely this idea, meaning that *t^{e}hôm* stands for the chaotic *status quo ante*.

It is further my impression that the sentence “Darkness was upon the face of the deep” is also a later addition. It seems to be connected to the redaction that inserted God’s word, acting as a contrast to the first command. In the original account, light and darkness are, like water and land, conceptualised as undifferentiated but pre-existing. According to v. 4, they are not created but separated from one another. The command “Let there be light”, on the other hand, produces light as something new. The status quo ante can thus not have been *tohû wābohû*, but must definitely have been darkness. “Darkness was upon the surface of the deep. [...] And God said: Let there be light.”

The remaining sentence: “The earth was without form and void (*tohû wābohû*)” describes the state from which creation departs. It must therefore have been part of the oldest version of this account, following the headline in v. 1. Here too one has of course sought mythical models, but without success. Etymology also takes us no further. The literal meaning of *tohû wābohû* emerges most clearly if one thinks backwards: it describes the state before the separation of light and dark, upper and lower ocean and, under the heavens, land and sea. The sentence is thus nothing more than a “not-yet-statement”, the like of which

20 Cf. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, ^{2}1951), 100: “To derive *tĕhôm* from *Tiʾâmat* is grammatically impossible.”

can be found at the beginning of many ancient creation accounts and reflects our inability to imagine the void that allegedly preceded all existence. The void is conceptualized as the not-yet. One should add, however, that this void is imagined as *material* nothingness, as it is generally in Antiquity.

4 The Original Shape of the Account Gen 2:5–3:24

At the beginning of the second creation account, this not-yet state is much more prominent. The presumed original version of this account reads as follows:

> (2:5) When no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, [...] (7) God formed man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. [...] (8) And [...] God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. [...] (19) And [...] God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man. [...] (20) And the man gave names to all [...] the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. [...] (21) And [...] God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. (22) And [...] God made the rib into a woman and brought her to the man. [...] (3:20) And the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. (21) And [...] God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them. [...] (4:1) Now the man knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.[21]

In this case, potential overlaps with ancient Near Eastern traditions are more readily apparent. The not-yet-statement the story opens with is reminiscent of *Enūma Elish* (I 1–9):

> When on high no name was given to heaven,
> Nor below was the netherworld called by name,
> Primeval Apsu was their progenitor,
> And matrix-Tiamat was she who bore them all,
> They were mingling their waters together,
> No reed hut was intertwined nor thicket had appeared,
> When no gods at all had brought forth,

21 For the source-critical analysis cf. Christoph Levin, *Der Jahwist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 82–92; idem, "Genesis 2–3: A Case of Innerbiblical Interpretation," in *Genesis and Christian Theology*, ed. Nathan MacDonald et al. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2012), 85–100; repr. in idem., *Re-Reading the Scriptures: Essays on the Literary History of the Old Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), 51–64.

> None called by names, none destinies ordained,
> Then were the gods formed within these two.[22]

What is presented in the Akkadian epics – and the Ugaritic myths as well – with great poetic art, is heavily condensed in the Bible. This is often the case, and it should not surprise us that the mythical elements disappear. It is worth noting that the only non-mythical element from the beginning of *Enūma Elish* is the one that occurs also in the biblical text, namely the not-yet-state of vegetation: "When no reed hut had been matted nor thicket had appeared (*gipāra lā kiṣṣuru ṣuṣâ la šeʾû*), then the gods were formed." This is all the more remarkable when one considers that the Akkadian text uses this motif because it wants to use the architectural conventions of the Mesopotamian plane to play with the double meaning of *gipāru* as reed and dwelling place.[23] The reference is not simply to vegetation, but also to settlements (and human culture in general), and perhaps also to the shrines as settlements of the gods. The parallel of Gen 2:5–7* is clear: "When no plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up, [...] God formed man and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life."

If one takes this parallel seriously, it is probably a mistake to imagine the *status quo ante* of Gen 2 as a waterless waste,[24] even if Apsu and Tiamat have disappeared. The contrast between Akkadian mythology and biblical creation account consists not in watery vs. dry chaos, but in divergent ideas about the divine. The first act of creation is not the creation of the gods, but of man. Since the events hardly progress beyond this point, the story is an anthropogony, not a cosmogony. Once the One and Only God has shaped man like a potter, he breathes life into him. Then he creates a garden for him to live in and brings into being the animals, whom the man names and thus has at his disposal. Finally, God creates the woman by duplicating the man out of his own substance. The man gives the woman her name and thereby acknowledges her as of his own kind. At the same time, this act conveys the destiny of the woman to become the mother of all mankind. The creation of man is only complete once God has created clothing as his attribute, since that is what distinguishes him from the ani-

22 Translation by Benjamin R. Foster, in *The Context of Scripture* (above note 4), vol. 1, 391 (with slight modifications).
23 Cf. Ignace J. Gelb et al., eds., *The Assyrian Dictionary*, vol. 5 (Chicago, Ill.: Oriental Institute, and Glückstadt: Augustin, 1956), 83, sub voce "gipāru": "1. residence of the enu-priest or entu-priestess, 2. part of a private house, 3. pasture, meadow, 4. taboo."
24 Thus, e.g., Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1997), 4; John Skinner, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, [2]1930), 51; and most others.

mals. Finally, the man mates with his woman, and the primordial couple creates mankind, marking the passage from myth into history.

5 Of Man's First Disobedience

This curiously harmonious picture did not remain the way it was, but became the matrix of one of the most impactful and puzzling narratives of the Western world. Chaos soon makes its return in the shape of conflict, which now plays out not among the gods, but between the One God and mankind. These conflicts have a different quality and urgency than the old myths do. The story now tells

> Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
> Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
> Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
> With loss of Eden.[25]

The story reads like the recollection of a lost childhood – and that is precisely what it is.

The first literary step in this direction was taken by the redactor who placed this text and the other parts of the primeval history at the beginning of a historical work that records the history of the Israelites from the creation of the world all the way to the threshold of the Promised Land. Based on the divine name used in the text, this work is generally called "Jahwist" or (in English) "Yahwist's History." Scholars long assumed that it dates to the early times of the monarchy in Israel and was produced to preserve the memory of an even more distant past. In the course of the last 50 years of research, this has turned out to be false. The Yahwist's History was in fact instigated by the deportation of parts of the Jewish elite to Babylon following the conquest of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. Almost all the narratives take place outside the traditional Judean heartland, and there is a persistent, emphatic interest in demonstrating that the god Yahweh is present and beneficent to his adherents not only in his traditional realm, but all over the world.[26]

Now, as one of the main features of the creation account the significance of the ground is added. *ʾādām* "man" and *ʾadāmāh* "ground" belong together. The

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25 Thus the first lines (I 1–4) of John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London and New York: Longman, 1968), 40–41.

26 Cf. Christoph Levin, "The Yahwist: The Earliest Editor in the Pentateuch," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 126 (2007): 209–230; repr. in *Re-Reading the Scriptures* (above note 21): 1–23.

ground is the matter from which man is created ("Yahweh God formed man [...] *from the ground*," 2:7) – though in reality, this would be impossible, given the difference between clay (hebr. *ḥomær*) and soil (hebr. *ʾᵃdāmāh*).[27] The ground is both the origin of man and his destiny, since it is his task "to till the ground" (2:5, 15; 3:23). God makes trees sprout "from the ground" (2:9) and moulds the animals out of its matter (2:19) – the same indirectly applies also to the woman, since she is made "from the man" (2:22). In the end, however, God curses the ground: "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken" (3:17). For the farmer, the heaviest penalty is exile: "Yahweh God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken" (3:23). From that point on, man lives as if uprooted. On an alien, cursed earth, he toils to fulfil his destiny. And here, we touch upon the historical situation this text is trying to explain.[28]

The cause of this fate lies less in the transgression than in tragedy. An emphasis on the transgression is introduced only by later additions (see below) and was brought out especially by the text's history of reception that found here man's original sin. Originally, the loss of innocence was more an inevitable, but tragic fate. God plants the trees of the garden for man's nourishment, "pleasant to the sight and good for food." Only one tree is reserved for him: "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:9). Partaking of it is forbidden under penalty of death (2:17). A reason for the prohibition is not given. If we ask what the point of this rule is, we find no real answers – only that this prohibition shows the man that he is man and not God. He is the recipient, not the creator of his world.

When the prohibition was made, the woman did not yet exist. As soon as she enters the world, she sees "every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food," just as God has created them (3:6 = 2:9), and since she cannot know the exceptional quality of the One Tree, it so happens that "she took of its fruit and ate." Like the woman, the man too is innocent; for he takes the fruit not from the tree, as was forbidden, but from the woman: "she gave some to her husband,

27 The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic, I 101–104, tells how the goddess Aruru creates Enkidu from clay (Akk. *ṭiṭu*). This is what is to be expected. Cf. Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic: Introduction, Critical Edition and Cuneiform Texts*, vol. 1 (Oxford: University Press, 2003), 544–545.

28 Joseph Blenkinsopp, "A Post-exilic Lay Source in Genesis 1–11," in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion*, ed. J. Ch. Gertz et al. (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2002), 49–61, esp. 51: "Death is threatened for non-observance, but what follows [...] is not death or social extinction but exile."

and he ate." It is not clear, whether he knew what he was eating. The fundamental *conditio humana* established by this act appears to be a matter of chance.

The result of eating the fruit of the forbidden tree is that the two newly created humans, who, like children, had known no shame (2:25), mature in an instant: They now feel shame (3:7) and, more importantly, they know good and evil. In the Old Testament, "knowing good and evil" is nothing bad, but a virtue: it is the ability to rationally deliberate and decide. It is what separates the grown-up from the child (Deut 1:39; Isa 7:15–16) and the wise man from the fool. It is an ability man shares with the gods, as 3:22, in a younger layer of the text, aptly notes: "the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil." The story expresses that this process of growing up is inevitable and necessarily results in being cast out of paradise. Friedrich Tuch concluded: "Thus there appears externally and fortuitously what has to be recognized as inward and necessary."[29] Now, the woman must fulfil with pain her destiny of bearing children, and will be subjugated to the man (3:16). The man, on the other hand, must supply his existence – this is the meaning of the Hebrew idiom *ʾkl læḥæm* "to eat bread"[30] – "in toil" (3:17) and fulfil his purpose outside the garden, namely "to till the ground from which he was taken" (3:23).

6 The "Humility Edition"

The ability "to know good and evil" that mature humans gained by partaking of the fruit brought them close to God – a closeness Jewish theologians must have considered dangerous. Some time later, the text was thus edited to produce what one might call a "Humility Edition", a term inspired by an editorial level Markus Witte and others have traced in the dialogue in the Book of Job.[31] Here, it emphasizes man's mortality as a difference between man and God. Of course, man is considered mortal also in the oldest version, a fact that was missed in the history of reception, not least due to the interpretation Paul advances in Romans 5:12: "Sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin." It was not – to quote again John Milton – "the forbidden tree, whose mortal taste brought death into the world." Death was already there, as it is the condi-

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29 Friedrich Tuch, *Kommentar über die Genesis* (Halle: Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1838), 48 (my translation).

30 Cf. Exod 2:20; Lev 26:5; 2 Kgs 4:8; Am 7:12; Ps 127:2.

31 Cf. Markus Witte, *Vom Leiden zur Lehre: Der dritte Redegang (Hiob 21–27) und die Redaktionsgeschichte des Hiobbuches* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1994), 91–115, 175–179, 194–205: "Die Niedrigkeitsredaktion."

tion of life. Immortality therefore needed to be introduced into the narrative as a lost chance. A comparable scene is found on the 11th tablet of the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, in which Gilgamesh retrieves the thorny plant from the subterranean ocean, "whereby a man may regain his life's breath" (Gilg. XI 296), but immediately loses it to the snake, granting it the rejuvenating ability to shed its skin.[32] The tragic constellation of these two scenes is identical.

The means used to stage this tragedy is again a tree of special quality: Now we find also the *tree of life* in the midst of the garden, right beside the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:9). This second tree, which was not originally forbidden, has no function in the story itself. It is mentioned again only at the end to provide a reason why God casts man out of the garden: "lest the man put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (3:22). In order to prevent this, God tasks the cherubim and the flaming sword, the weather god's mythical companions in northwest-Semitic mythology, "to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24). This lost opportunity gains its dramatic depth from man's frailty: "For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (3:19). This is taken directly from the lament about the ephemerality of life familiar to us from the psalms (e. g. Ps 22:16; 44:26; 103:14; 104:29; Job 10:9; 30:19; Prov 3:20; 12:7). As such, man is now made neither from clay, nor from soil, but from dust (2:7, hebr. *ʿāpār*).

7 The Temptation

But the way to the tree of life becoming a lost opportunity is not the most theologically impactful change made to the story. This honour is due to the next step, the appearance of the snake, for only now does sin as such enter the scene. Paradoxically, this happens because later writers, struck, like us, by the tragedy of the whole affair, were eager to absolve mankind of immediate responsibility. The woman no longer acted on spontaneous impulse, but succumbs to temptation.

Chaos now invades the newly created world once again, with a third force appearing on stage besides God and man that is neither of the two. The reception history is dominated by this figure. In Milton's *Paradise Lost* and many other authors, the snake, masculine in Hebrew, stands for an entire world of powers inimical to God and man. Here it is particularly important to distinguish between the actual tradition and its impact, and this applies both to the mythic content that may have predated the text, and to its later history of reception.

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32 See above note 27.

One must first be aware that the writers were bound by what is written in the earlier text. That the dialogue-scene in 3:1–5 and the related passage in 3:6 ("and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise") as well as the curse on the snake in 3:13b–15 are later additions is apparent from stylistic changes, especially from God's name changing from *Yhwh ʾælohîm* to simply *ʾælohîm* "God". Since the only *dramatis personae* on the world stage so far were God and the two humans, the third power had to be taken from the animal world "that Yahweh God had made" (cf. 2:19). The snake was the obvious choice, since its lethal bite and its ability to shed its skin rendered it a being of great ambivalent power. In Egypt, a country swarming with snakes, "the snake surpasses all other animals of the Egyptian mythology in its colourful ambiguity."[33] In ancient Syro-Palestinian iconography, the snake often appears as a divine attribute.[34] For Gen 3 it may further be significant that the Hebrew root *nḥš* can also denote divination. In the narrative the snake's intellect is visible in its ability to speak. This comes as no surprise to the woman, and even the reader is not truly surprised. After all, the conversation between woman and snake could just as well be the woman's interior monologue.

The snake has no independent role to play. It tempts, nothing more. In her interrogation, the woman clearly expresses this: "The serpent beguiled me, and I ate" (3:13b). For God, this is reason enough to curse the snake. Close inspection reveals that the writers were able to glean all the details the snake puts forward in its conversation with the woman from the existing text. Even the statements "You will not die," and "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil," are not blasphemous, but take up what the text in 3:22–24 already said.

The same is true of the replies the woman gives to the snake. In them, however, the authors ignore the sequence of events: they have the woman quote to the snake the prohibition that was uttered when she had not been created yet. Almost instantly, readers of the bible came to consider this a problem. Josephus Flavius has the woman be created before the garden is planted and makes God address the prohibition to both man and woman.[35] The Babylonian Talmud maintains that the narrative sequence does not reproduce the sequence of events: Accordingly God pronounced the prohibition only in the ninth hour of

33 Erik Hornung, "Die Bedeutung des Tieres im alten Ägypten," *Studium Generale* 20 (1967): 69–84, esp. 81 (my translation).

34 Cf. Othmar Keel, *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1977), 71–114; idem and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Edinburgh: Clark, 1998), 272–274.

35 Antiquitates Iudaicae I,1,4 (40 Niese).

the day of man's creation, after the creation of the woman in the seventh hour, moreover also after the birth of her children in the eighth hour – since all later human offspring are affected by the fall.[36] Others claimed that Adam must have told the woman of the prohibition immediately after her creation. John Milton too adopts this solution when he has Adam warn Eve by saying:

> [God] requires
> From us no other service than to keep
> This one, this easy charge, of all the trees
> In Paradise that bear delicious fruit
> So various, not to taste that only tree
> Of knowledge, planted by the tree of life, [...]
> God hath pronounced it death to taste that tree,
> The only sign of our obedience left
> Among so many signs of power and rule
> Conferred upon us, and dominion given
> Over all other creatures that possess
> Earth, air and sea.[37]

By having Satan overhear this conversation, Milton also solves another problem: How could the snake have known of the tree's special qualities, which allowed it to challenge and tempt the woman?

The attempt to absolve man of responsibility only served to make everything worse. Regardless of how the woman learned of the prohibition, her conversation with the snake presupposes that she did indeed know of it. As such, she violates it knowingly and intentionally. Even though she succumbs to a temptation, no one can lift the burden of responsibility she bears. There is no doubt as to her guilt, and the same is true of the man. Under these circumstances, the story thus reads as though the fall was the cause of mankind's plight of mortality.

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36 Tractate Sanhedrin 38b: "R. Johanan b. Hanina said: The day consisted of twelve hours. In the first hour, his dust was gathered; in the second, it was kneaded into a shapeless mass. In the third, his limbs were shaped; in the fourth, a soul was infused into him; in the fifth, he arose and stood on his feet; in the sixth, he gave (the animals) their names; in the seventh, Eve became his mate; in the eighth, they ascended to bed as two and descended as four; in the ninth, he was commanded not to eat of the tree, in the tenth, he sinned; in the eleventh, he was tried, and in the twelfth he was expelled and departed, for it is written, *Man abideth not in honour* (Ps 49:13)." Translation: Isidore Epstein, ed., *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Nezikin*, vol. 3 (London: Soncino, 1935), 242.

37 Milton, *Paradise Lost* (above note 25), 220 (IV 419–432).

This is a reading we should strongly oppose. My analysis of this text was not only intended to show how its contradictions can be explained as the results of a process of literary revision, but also to counter the millennia-old, fatalistic and sin-theological interpretation of the fate of mankind that this text provided the basis for. This interpretation is wrong. The limited duration of human life is the *conditio sine qua non* of history; and though we may individually suffer under it, we cannot do without it, and it is thus by no means fatal. It is also true that human culture begins in every respect with knowledge of good and evil. Longing for a protolapsarian state leads us back not to paradise, but to social and cultural chaos. However, there is also a profound truth here, whether intended by the authors or not, in that culture and history begin with disobedience. Creation, which we experience daily and help shape with our existence, presupposes chaos. And as bad as chaos is, it would be worse if it did not exist.