3. Finding a Fitting Companion: Reading Genesis After Cavell

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> And the Lord God said, "It is not good for *ha adam* to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him"
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> Genesis 2:18[1]

1. Prologue: Cavell's Oblique Relation to Genesis

At least in broad outlines, the story told in the early chapters of Genesis is well known. Its tale of the origin of human beings, their transgression of God's commands, and their expulsion from their garden paradise represents a vital cultural touchstone helping to shape the horizon within which we conceive the nature of men and women (their samenesses and their differences), the structures and dynamics of the relationships (of desire, power, and authority) between humans and God and between men and women, and how both of these sets of structures and dynamics enter into (serve, disrupt, alter) the ends and aspirations of individual human lives and of human life as such.

Given Cavell's engagement with themes of marriage and the role of desire in perfectionist transformation, it is notable that he never offered a sustained reading of this tale of marriage and the consequences of desire. He frequently mentions some of

1. Genesis quotations are from *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler (Oxford University Press, 2004). However, I depart from this translation in leaving "*ha* adam," which it renders as "the man," untranslated. Robert Alter uses "the human," which is preferable to "the man" but frequently awkward. See his *Genesis: Translations and Commentary* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1996). Although *ha adam* takes masculine pronouns, it is not equivalent to man [*ish*] nor is it the proper name Adam which is first used at Genesis 4:25.

its specific moments and he emphasizes that its account of "the creation of the woman, of the difference between the sexes," can be understood as an account of "the (re)creation of the human."[2] However, when developing central philosophical ideas, Cavell turns less to Genesis itself than to Milton's treatments of it. In *Pursuits of Happiness*, he uses Milton's reading of Genesis 2:18–25 to argue that the purpose of marriage in remarriage comedy is not reproduction or economic security but the pair's ongoing cultivation through what Milton calls "meet and happy conversation."[3] And in *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome*, when Cavell turns to elaborating the vision of Moral Perfectionism exemplified in the remarriage comedies of *Pursuits*, Genesis is not included among the texts he mentions as contributing to this moral vision but *Paradise Lost* is.[4]

No one can address everything, of course. But Cavell's oblique relation to Genesis may be encouraged by ways in which, after Augustine, it has been read as demonstrating our fallen condition and our need to submit to external authority—women to the authority of men and all to the authority of the church/state.[5] For so understood, the opening chapters of Genesis will be antithetical to Cavell's vision of marriage and to his perfectionism. My interest here, though, is not primarily to investigate Cavell's relation to Genesis but to begin developing a reading of the text that justifies its inclusion in the conversation among perfectionist texts that his work encourages us to recognize. The central idea informing my reading is that, contrary to Augustine, the early chapters of Genesis do not depict a fall from original human perfection but, instead, trace the actions and events through which novice or proto-humans begin to achieve their humanity.[6] These chapters, then, represent a birth narrative that culminates with expulsion from the womb of Eden into the wider world of human life and labor. This birth is initiated and aided by God but, in Genesis, hu-

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2. Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters on a Register of the Moral Life* (Harvard University Press, 2004), 80.
3. See Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Harvard University Press, 1981), especially 58 and 87.
4. Cavell, *Conditions Handsome and Unhandsome: The Constitution of Emersonian Perfectionism* (The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 5.
5. For an illuminating account of how Augustine displaced a 400-year Christian tradition of reading Genesis as testifying to human freedom, see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (Vintage Books, 1989).
6. For a reading of the whole of Genesis along these lines, see Kant's "Conjectural Beginning of Human History" included in *Kant on History*, ed. Lewis White Beck (Macmillan/Library of the Liberal Arts, 1985).

mans differ from other creatures in that only they can, and must, complete their own creation.[7]

Given constraints of space, I focus on the first beginnings of the perfectionist journey in Genesis 2. In this chapter *ha adam* discovers that he requires, and comes to desire, a companion with whom he can develop into humanity. These initial steps are momentous but stumbling. *Ha adam's* expression of delight in beholding the companion God creates seems to render her temporarily speechless, unable to contribute to the work that compelled her creation, and to drive her to seek conversation with a welcoming serpent. My detailed reading ends at this perilous point. However, I conclude by gesturing toward Genesis 3 and its account of how the woman finds her voice and initiates the next steps of human development.[8]

2. Divine Seduction and Perilous Intimacy

Although the point is emphasized, we may fail to notice that the first human was not created in Eden. We are told that "the Lord God formed *ha adam* from the dust of the earth [*adamah*]" and "blew into his nostrils the breath of life" (2:7) and subsequently that the "Lord God planted a garden in Eden … *and placed there ha adam whom He had formed*" (2:8, my emphasis). The point is repeated a few verses later: "The Lord God *took ha adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden*, to till and tend it" (2:15, my emphasis). We learn, then, that there was always more to the world than Eden and, more importantly, that paradise was never our original home. It was always somewhere we are placed by God or a condition toward which we must aspire.

This emphasis on relocation calls us to consider how God might "take" and "place" *ha adam* into Eden. Drawing on the preeminent 11th century commentator Rabbi Shelomo Yitzhaki (called Rashi), Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg suggests that "force

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7. In *The Murmuring Deep: Reflections on the Biblical Unconscious* (Schocken Books, 2009), Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg notes that, in the biblical narrative, "the vertical imagery of falling is entirely absent. Instead, an *outward* movement expels Adam and Eve from the Garden: "And the Lord God *banished* him from the Garden of Eden. […] He *drove* the man *out*' (Gen. 3:23-24). This is not a fall," Zornberg continues, "but, in a sense, a birth. Paradise is lost, but a larger, if more agitated life looms" (17).
8. Informed by Paul Deb's vision of this volume as a dinner party to which contributors bring texts, my reading unfolds in brief conversational moments each of which might be discussed and, perhaps, brought into relation to other texts at our gathering before proceeding to the next section.

is inappropriate in moving a human being." Rather, according to Rashi, God "[captivated] him with beautiful words and seduced him into the Garden."[9] Perhaps God described the beauty of the garden, with "every tree that was pleasing to the sight" (2:8), and assured *ha adam* that He too would be there to share its pleasures and "walk about in [...] the evening breeze" (3:8).[10] Whatever God's words may have been, Zornberg argues that Rashi's midrash "makes seduction [by God] the first human experience." Indeed, she continues, it shows that seduction "is constitutive of man's entry into language" and, therefore, into humanity.[11]

The pivotal role of divine seduction should inform our understanding of the serpent's subsequent seduction of the woman and her seduction of the man. Immediately, though, it highlights the intimacy of relationship between God and *ha adam*; an intimacy underscored by their sharing the Garden's pleasures but rooted in the nature of *ha adam's* creation. In contrast to the creation account in Genesis 1, in which a sublimely detached God calls humans into being solely through speech ("And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" [1:26]), in Genesis 2:7 God is on earth and creation is a hands-on affair. God works with earth to "form" an individual human body which He then brings to life with a kind of kiss. Michelangelo, perhaps unwilling to allow the earthy intimacy of God and human, famously depicts a distant God reaching down from the heavens to bring the human to life with a touch of his upraised finger. But American cartoonist R. Crumb is closer to the text in depicting God kneeling beside the body, lifting the torso to cradle its head in His arms, placing His mouth close to its lips, and animating *ha adam* with His breath.[12] This is literal inspiration and suggests that, if seduction is the first human experience, the divine inspiration that brings us to life is the condition for any experience at all.

This intimacy is beautiful but perilous. Charged with divine breath, *ha adam* may fail to appreciate his difference from God. Hence, God promptly complicates their intimacy by issuing a command: "Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die" (2:16–17). In being addressed to *ha adam*, these words

9. Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep*, 6.
10. Here I use Alter's more poetic translation.
11. Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep*, 6–7.
12. See R. Crumb, *The Book of Genesis: Illustrated* (W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

affirm their relationship and honor him as a being moved by words rather than force. Yet, as a command, they establish an essential hierarchy. God and *ha adam* are intimately related but profoundly different; notwithstanding God's animating kiss, they are not companions and certainly not lovers.

3. Encountering Animals and Discovering Aloneness

Issuing a command establishes distance between God and *ha adam* but does not fully remove the danger inherent in the intimacy of their relationship. Accordingly, God's next words assert, as if to Himself, "It is not good for *ha adam* to be alone" (2:18). The problem is not that *ha adam* may be lonely (and presumably unable to reproduce) but that he may *not* be lonely or recognize his need for another. As the sole instance of human being, *ha adam* exhausts its possibilities and will, especially since he knows himself to have been created by God, quite naturally experience himself as fully realized and complete. He will languish in static self-satisfaction with no desire for development and growth. Indeed, given his proximity to God and the intimacy of their relationship, he may struggle to experience himself as *human* at all but, instead, will readily conceive himself as a kind of god.

God's remedy for this problem, to "make a fitting helper for him" (2:18), is more complex than it may seem. For while *God* knows what it means to be alone, why that is not good, what *ha adam* needs help with, and so what a fitting helper may be, the novice human does not. God's remedy, then, must help *ha adam* come to appreciate just these matters.

This demand informs a critical textual moment that may otherwise seem a puzzling narrative delay. Rather than immediately creating the woman who will eventually join *ha adam*, "the Lord God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to *ha adam* to see what he would call them" (2:19).[13] Since they too are formed of earth by God, these beasts and birds are kin to *ha adam* and, by bringing them to him for naming, God shows him that he lives

13. In *Cities of Words* (47), Cavell speaks of this moment as a "detour" which, among other things, allows the man "time to come into his own words" and "to survey the world of living things and to learn that none but the woman will make him feel other than alone."

among a host of kin. But this awakens *ha adam* to his being alone. For while "*ha adam* gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; … for *ha adam*, no fitting helper was found" (2:20). It is precisely in understanding himself to be surrounded by kin, none of whom strike him as a fitting helper, that *ha adam* begins to experience himself as alone.

At least in a limited sense, then, *ha adam* himself has come to regard it as "not good" to be alone and his subsequent reaction to the woman makes clear that his desire for a companion has been powerfully aroused. However, before turning to the appearance of the woman, we need to consider the activity of naming the animals. God's assigning *ha adam* this task does more than ensure that he encounters his animal kin. It informs his understanding of himself and the kind of creature he is and, therefore, serves his developing understanding of the sense in which he is alone, of why his animal kin cannot satisfy his awakened desire, and of the capacities a true companion must possess.

4. The Lone Human Speaker and the Need for a Different Voice

God neither commands nor explicitly directs *ha adam* to name the animals but simply brings them to him "to see what he would call them." Evidently God can presume *ha adam* will call them *something*, the only question is *what*. This divine presumption reveals that, for humans, it is natural to speak, to call out our experience. Further, this calling out is not a merely instinctual or quasi-mechanical reaction to stimuli but an effort to communicate by telling how things strike us.

In Genesis, the fact that speaking is part of our nature is a function of our being created in God's image and inspired by His breath. Further, human speech shares in the creative power of divine speech in that it brings into being by calling out, and so differentiating, entities within experience.[14] This creation is not the whim of individual speakers but is also not beholden to a pre-existing divine order—as though God's creative activity had already identified each of the world's possibilities. In

14. In *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (Free Press, 2003), Leon Kass notes that "Human naming, while it does not create the world, creates a linguistic world, a second world…" (76).

granting *ha adam* both the power and the right to name, God makes him a partner in the ongoing work of creation. As *ha adam* calls out names, God learns about him and learns how His creation strikes him and the form and order it has for him. Further, God accepts *ha adam's* wording of the world: "whatsoever *ha adam* called each living creature, that would be its name" (2:19). Indeed, we might even say that, as *ha adam* is brought to life through the breath of God, the animals are brought to life through the breath of *ha adam*. His calling out names distinguishes animals into distinct kinds and, in that sense, completes their creation.

This bears directly on *ha adam's* understanding of his aloneness and the nature of a fitting companion. His calling out names divides beings into those who name and those who are named or, more generally, into those who speak and those who do not.[15] *Ha adam*, then, discovers that he alone is an intermediate being who is neither God nor animal but kin to both. He is kin to God through sharing in the creative power of speech, but he differs from God in being formed of earth. He is kin to animals in being formed of earth, but he differs from them in possessing a god-like power of speech with which he completes their creation. As intermediate, *ha adam* can enjoy forms of relationship with both God and animals, but he knows himself to be the lone human speaker.

This is not good and arouses *ha adam's* desire for a companion of his kind. The text says nothing of how he envisions this companion.[16] We know, though, that as another intermediate being it must be a fellow speaker who can share in the work of wording the world and this alone allows us to determine some of the companion's essential qualities. In particular, the companion must be, and must be recognized as being, an independent speaker who is able to declare, from their own position, how experience strikes them. Further, the companion's declarations must possess equal authority to disclose the human and the human world. Indeed, not only can the male voice be granted no special status, the work of bringing the world to words requires voices that are, in important respects, different. Hence, the companion is not simply *another* speaker but a speaker both like and unlike *ha adam*; in short, a different

15. As Kass puts this: "Man's naming of the animals reveals to him his human difference; he names the animals, but they cannot name him." (ibid.)
16. However, according to a fascinating midrash on the human's deep sleep during the creation of the woman, "Adam dreams the woman and wakes, pulsing with agitation, to the fulfillment of his dream." Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep*, 10.

form of human—a woman.[17] This is obviously not the only reason for sexual difference in Genesis. However, sexual difference both emblematizes and encourages differences in perspective, experience, and voice and shows those differences to be necessary. Accordingly, God's declaration that it is not good for *ha adam* to be alone speaks against having only one *kind* of voice (e.g., a male voice) even if there are many speaking in it. It is only through distinct kinds of voices declaring what strikes them, discovering their agreements, and working to resolve their differences, that the project of creating a common human world can be engaged.

With these considerations we stand at the threshold of God's creation of the woman. In looking beyond his animal kin for the companion he now desires, *ha adam* shows that, at some level, he understands the companion's necessary characteristics. However, as we will soon see, his understanding is dim, untested, and undeveloped.

5. Fashioning the Woman: (How) Is She Brought to Life?

Two points about the woman's creation call for consideration. We are told that

> the Lord God cast a deep sleep upon *ha adam*; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. And the Lord God fashioned the rib that He had taken from *ha adam* into a woman; and He brought her to the man (2:21–22).

First, we may be tempted to read the mention of deep sleep as marking *ha adam's* ignorance of God's plan to create another human. However, if God would not "place" *ha adam* in Eden by force, He would hardly take a rib without his agreement. We do better to understand *ha adam's* deep sleep as marking not his ignorance of God's plan but his exclusion from this aspect of His creative work. It shows *ha adam* that, with the woman, he is not to play the kind of creative role he played with his animal

17. As I will soon discuss, the names "man/*ish*" and "woman/*ishah*" are given by the man (2:23) and are, in various ways, problematic. However, although the text will continue to use *ha adam* to name the first human, now that we have two forms of human I will begin using "man" and "woman." I will continue to use *ha adam* only when addressing events prior to the introduction of sexual difference. I emphasize, however, that "man" and "woman" are not neutral or uncontested names and that there are costs to the convenience of using them.

kin. This expedient, alas, is not fully effective and we will soon see the man insert himself into this new phase of creation in ways that fundamentally shape the relationship between the pair and, indeed, the fate of human being as such.

Second, it seems clear that the woman is fashioned entirely from the extracted rib with no admixture earth (*adamah*). But it is not clear how, or whether, she is brought to life. About *ha adam*, we are told how he was fashioned and, separately, that he became a living being through the breath of God. With the woman we are told only how she is fashioned. Given this textual silence, we may imagine that, since she is fashioned of a living human's rib, no separate animating act is required. Alternatively, we may imagine that, like the animals, she is brought to life through the breath of *ha adam*. For in this case too we are told that God fashioned a being and "brought her to *ha adam*" who called out a name. However, while *ha adam* may imagine that his naming gives the woman life, important textual details speak against this view. First, *ha adam's* calling out the name "woman" is not divinely endorsed with the claim that "whatever *ha adam* called [this being] was its name." But further, while we are told that God brought the woman to *ha adam*, we are not told that He did so "to see what *ha adam* would call her." God may well have wanted to learn what *she* would call him or, indeed, what they would call each other.

My suggestion is that we read the text's silence about how the woman is brought to life as showing that, at this point, her creation is not complete and, further, that she herself must enact her coming to life. As I will, albeit only briefly, contend in my epilogue, she must bring herself to life through claiming her voice and speaking for herself. In this, she is emblematic of all humans other than *ha adam*. Only he is fashioned of earth and brought to life through the breath of God. The rest of us, like the woman, are fashioned of human material and must achieve our lives, come into them, through the power of our own breath.

6. Ecstatic Speech and Awareness of Self

Although we are told that *ha adam* names the animals, we are given no examples. Hence, his words in response to beholding the woman are the text's first instance of human speech.

> This one at last
> Is bone of my bones
> And flesh of my flesh.
> This one shall be called Woman,
> For from man was she taken (2: 23).

Seeing his animal kin provoked *ha adam* to call out names. But in the face of the woman, the man delivers a poetic pair of sentences that voice a reaction, declare a view of what the woman is, and announce both what she will be called and the reason why she will be so called. As the first speech we are given, this is meant to exemplify important aspects of human speech as such.[18]

Ha adam's fruitless search for a companion among his animal kin has ended and the urgency of his mounting desire is revealed in the release of "This one at last." The "at last" shows these sentences to be pervasively shaped by desire and, in using them to open the first example of human speech, the text suggests that all human speech is rooted in, and called forth by, forms of desire. Further, these sentences show that the poetic register is as original, and as natural, to human speech as the literal. For although the woman is literally composed of material drawn from *ha adam*, the man's joyful "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" is also a metaphorical expression of (his sense of) the depth and naturalness of their suitability as companions. It is that sense of their suitability, not their literally sharing the same flesh, that causes his joy. Finally, and most importantly, these sentences reveal the ecstatic power of human speech—that is, its power to move us beyond immediate experience and allow us to reflect on ourselves. In calling out names for animals, *ha adam* is immersed in his experience and focused simply on the animals. Since these names express what strikes or impresses him about the animals, he is revealed in this naming (hence God can learn about him) but he is not revealed to himself. However, in beholding the woman, the man is drawn beyond his immersion in the immediacy of experience. While his attention is very much on the woman, the presence of another human leads him, for the first time, to also attend to himself and to consider what is striking about himself. Hence, in regarding the woman he also becomes an explicit

18. My remarks here are informed by Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 77–78.

object of his own attention and so, in speaking of the woman he also speaks of himself: "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken."

7. A Fundamental Transformation

The man's declaration of this intimacy of connection immediately prompts a pair of verses instituting marriage and announcing human sexuality: "Hence a man leaves his mother and father and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh. The two of them were naked, the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame" (2:24–25). However, much of the power of the man's speech lies in declaring, and in so doing furthering, a fundamental transformation in the nature of being human.

In fashioning the woman, God does not simply expand the human scene—doubling the population—but radically alters it. The creation of sexual difference means there is no longer one form of human so, henceforth, no individual human and no single form of human can be *the human* or *ha adam*. The man's speech reflects his understanding of this transformation. His "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" both acknowledges the woman as a fellow human, rather than another of his animal kin, and shows his recognition that he is now only one form of human. But the man also furthers this transformation of human being by bringing it to words and calling out names. In so doing, and contrary to God's purpose in casting him into sleep while fashioning the woman, he plays a critical role in the creation of human difference.[19]

It is clear that the man names the woman—"This one shall be called Woman." However, it is crucial to recognize that, in his ecstatic state of regarding himself along with the new being before him, the man not only speaks about them both but calls out names for both: *ish*/man and *ishah*/woman. This twofold act of naming is obscured by translations that render *ha adam* as "man." However, it is only in this speech that the name *ish* (man) is introduced by the man himself.[20] When he regards himself, this is

19. God undoubtedly intended humans to continue their own creation and to do so, in part, by determining what to call themselves. What is contrary to God's purpose is that the man does so alone.
20. Apart from this naming, *ish* is not used to refer to the first human. He continues to be called *ha adam* until 4:25 when the proper name Adam is introduced.

what he calls out as most striking about himself. As he sees himself, at least at this moment, he is not a mere creature of earth (*ha adam*) but *ish*—the source from which this radiant new being, *ishah*, derives. Hence, while his calling out the name "woman" is more explicit, he names her only through, and by reference to, the name he gives himself: "This one shall be called Woman [*ishah*], for from man [*ish*] was she taken." Evidently, then, for all his delight in her, what the man initially finds most striking or impressive about the woman is (what he sees as) her relation to himself and the ways in which she enlarges or enhances him. She is yet more of his own flesh and bone.[21]

This speech, then, both marks and enacts a monumental development by recognizing, celebrating, and participating in creating human difference. The man's calling out names establishes distinct and determinate forms of human being and so achieves the final fulfillment of God's desire that the human not be alone—that is, not be homogeneous and of one voice. This difference among humans is salutary in working against fantasies of God-like completeness and self-sufficiency, but it is also salutary in provoking tensions and conflicts that can lead to ongoing development.[22]

8. Problematic Incorporation

However, while the man's speech effects a fundamental and salutary transformation, the text also intends us to recognize that his act of naming is problematic in at least two key respects: it is a unilateral act by only one speaker; and it renders the woman subordinate to, or secondary to, the man who represents himself as her source.[23]

The problem with the naming being unilateral is that one of God's central purposes in creating a companion was precisely to introduce a separate and distinct voice

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21. As we will see, the man will come to declare another name, Eve, which reflects a more generous view of her most striking qualities.
22. The story of the Tower of Babel (11:1-8) exemplifies both of these aspects of God's desire for difference. Confusing "the language, so that one will not understand the language of his companion" (11:7) disrupts the common project of building "a city and a tower with its top in heaven" (11:4). But it also prevents human stagnation in uniformity and promotes development by "scattering" people across "the face of the entire earth" (11:8). The dual aspects of this tale are richly developed by Kass (*The Beginning of Wisdom* [217-243]).
23. There may, of course, be other respects in which modern readers may regard this naming as problematic—for instance, that it divides humans dichotomously so that any human must be either simply man or simply woman. My aim here, however, is not to criticize this act of naming from the outside but to show how it is challenged by the text itself.

into the shared work of bringing the human world and human experience to words. As I emphasized earlier, distinct perspectives and impressions not only foster a richer and more developed experience, but the effort to navigate differences and resolve disputes is essential to creating a shared or common world. However, this way of calling out and differentiating forms of being human is the product of only one voice and does not draw upon or reflect any contribution by the other.

The fact that the naming construes the man as the source of the woman who is, therefore, represented as secondary and subordinate is itself problematic on several grounds.

Notice, first, that this gesture of incorporation turns on the man, *ish*, identifying himself with *ha adam*; for the rib from which the new form of human was fashioned was taken from *ha adam* not from man/*ish*.[24] Man/*ish* comes into being only along with woman/*ishah* through the act of naming. This is not a merely terminological quibble. As I have emphasized, with God's creation of a new human form no one is any longer *ha adam* or "the human." Hence, the creation of a second form of human is also a new creation of the first. The act of removing a rib modifies *ha adam*, but he remains *ha adam*. However, creating a new form of human from that rib eliminates *ha adam* and so also recreates the original human.[25] In treating *ish* as identical to *ha adam*, or imagining that *ha adam* was always man/*ish*, the man fails to recognize the ways in which—even if his bodily form is largely unchanged—he too is a new creation. Man and woman each exists as the being they are only because of the other. That said, if there is any sense in which one depends on the other, we might with greater justice call the woman the source of the man; for it is only beholding her that inspires him to consider himself and to identify himself as man.[26]

Another problem is that, in construing himself as the source of the woman, the man's act of naming makes the pair too close. Although sharing the same flesh is celebrated as an image of their suitability as companions, it also represents the connection between them as too natural and immediate. The ideal of achieved intimacy in

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24. Again, translations that render *ha adam* as "man" obscure the fact that this identification is mistaken.
25. This, I suggest, is part of what Cavell meant in speaking of the creation of the woman as "the (re)creation of the human" (*Cities of Words*, 80).
26. As we will see, the man himself comes to view the woman as his source.

the metaphor of *becoming* one flesh is disturbed by the incestuous taint of their literally *being* one flesh.[27] This problem is inherent in the account of the woman's creation, but the man's naming exacerbates it. Hence, the verse instituting marriage that follows this naming insists that a man "leave his father and mother"—i.e., those with whom he is literally one flesh—and "cling to his wife"—.i.e., to one from a different family group.

Finally, in representing the woman as a derivative part of himself, the man's speech diminishes her standing as an equally authoritative contributor to the ongoing development of human being and to the work of creating a shared human world. This is not simply a problem in that the man will imagine himself the presumptive victor in any dispute and as inherently meriting the last word. Such a posture would still allow at least *some* hearing for the woman's voice and *some* possibility that the man's final word bespeaks her influence. The deeper problem is that, due to the man's posture, there may be no dispute or contention at all. His joyful incorporation of the woman may block his acknowledgement of her separate identity so thoroughly that he fails to recognize her words and actions as expressing a distinct point of view. She will be visible to him, that is, only to the extent that he can regard her as reflecting him. Further, while the man may fail to see the woman, she, in turn, may increasingly disappear. The denial of her equal authority may, in time, lead the woman to withhold any dissenting voice and withdraw from any field of contestation. Or, worse, she may internalize the man's view of her as subordinate and willingly abandon, or even renounce, the effort to discover and assert her own voice.

The second portion of the marital injunction to the man, that he "clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh," addresses these threats. Notwithstanding the strong emphasis on flesh and fleshly embodiment, we should not construe clinging to the wife solely, or even primarily, physically—as though it simply involved the kind of sexual embrace implied in the text's mention of unashamed nakedness. Rather, in light of the pervasive insistence on speaking as what distinguishes humans, we should also recognize clinging as an image of active attentiveness to the words of the

27. Here we intersect an issue Cavell raises about the principal pair in remarriage comedy. The couple's having a "natural" connection or their having "grown up together" grounds our conviction in the rightness of their union. However, this natural connection must be broken to remove the taint of incest and allow "an intimacy of difference or reciprocity to supervene." (*Pursuits of Happiness*, 103).

other.[28] Against the man's drive to incorporate the woman, this part of the injunction enjoins him to, as it were, hang on her every word; that is, to hearken to her and allow himself to be instructed by the ways she calls out her experience.

9. The Woman's Silence

Noticing these problematic aspects of the man's speech brings us to an especially striking feature of these verses (2:22–23): in this first encounter between man and woman, the woman is completely silent. As I emphasized in discussing the man's naming of animals, in Genesis it is human nature to speak out and give voice to experience. Indeed, this aspect of humans is underscored by the man's immediate exclamation upon beholding the woman. The woman's silence, then, demands explanation. The fact that she is a fitting companion means she is *able* to speak and, indeed, the text will insist on her capacity: when we next see her she is in conversation with a serpent and she is later shown calling out names for her sons Cain and Seth (4:1 and 4:25). How, then, should we understand her not calling out her experience upon beholding the man? Several possibilities present themselves.[29]

One possibility is that the woman's experience is as yet too confused for her to call out anything at all. For the man, the woman appears against a familiar background in which she is new and so provokes his speaking out. For the woman, everything is new. Fresh from the hands of God, she stands in speechless confusion. We may be tempted to presume that the man must be the center of her attention—as she is clearly the center of his. But her attention may be too disoriented to have any center and the man's immediate eruption into speech only adds to the blur. Finding

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28. Hence, while the images of "clinging" to a lover and "becoming one flesh" are bound to recall the speech of Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium*, Genesis rejects the dream of achieving literal (re)union that Aristophanes's speech imputes to all who love most deeply. In Genesis, the marital ideal of becoming one flesh is not the achievement of undifferentiated union but the intimacy of mutual responsiveness to the unending difference of the other.

29. I mention, only to set aside, the idea that this reflects the text's view that women *should* be silent in the presence of men because their speech leads men astray (into, for instance, eating forbidden fruit). This is clearly unsupported by the text. We have seen that, on the contrary, one of God's central purposes in creating the woman was to add a distinct voice to the work of articulating the human world. More directly, though, it is noteworthy that, in the description of eating forbidden fruit, the woman does not speak. The text says simply that she "did eat; and gave unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (3:6).

her voice, then, will require time, and perhaps quiet, in which her experience can consolidate.[30]

A further, non-competing, possibility is that although the woman is created with the capacity to speak, she has not yet discovered and claimed her *right* to speak. Her silence, then, reflects the fact that she has not yet come into, achieved, her independent existence—something she will do only in and through claiming a voice in her own story. This will take time, but the text also suggests—both directly and indirectly—that it will involve a kind of struggle with, and a movement of separation from, the man. That is, if beholding the woman inspires him to speak, there are at least two features of his speech that suggest it may silence her.

First, it allows the woman no space of time or quiet into which she may voice her developing experience—of the man or of herself. Instead, the room for speech is immediately occupied, even usurped, by the man's declaration. She is brought before the man and, before she can so much as take in the scene, he leaps in with excited declarations of what they are and what they will be called. It may well seem, then, that there is nothing left for her to say—at least about herself or about him. Indeed, while the man's excited speech reflects his real joy, his leaping in to occupy the room for speech may also suggest anxiety in the face of another speaking being. Since she too has the power to name, she can name him and she may not see him as, or name him as, he sees and names himself.[31]

Second, the man shows no interest in what the woman has to say and does not invite her to speak. He does not resist his impulse to speak immediately and so allow her to do so. But he also asks her no questions and does not even extend her the implicit invitation to speak that inheres in being addressed. He speaks *about* her but not *to* her. Hence, although he is filled with joy at having a companion with whom he can share in conversation, his excitement (mixed with anxiety) undermines him. In his joy, he not only fails to welcome the woman into conversation but effectively silences her.

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30. My thought here is akin to Cavell's claim noted earlier that the narrative "detour" of naming animals allows the man "time to come into his own words."
31. This may recall Hegel's master-slave dialectic and his argument that the primal human encounter is a struggle for recognition.

10. Seduced into Language

The first human encounter, then, presents a stark contrast; the woman is mute and (temporarily) unable to claim her right to speak while the man is overconfident in both his right and his ability to word the world. Consequently, the man has at least begun to achieve his existence while the woman remains, in an important sense, unborn. This contrast highlights a further dimension of what these verses reveal about human speech and the process of achieving human existence. The different positions of the man and woman show that we must be invited, drawn, or seduced into language. To find your voice and claim your right to speak, you must be acknowledged as a fellow speaker with something to say. Some other(s) must show that they welcome your voice and desire your contribution.

Ha adam is invited into language by God. God speaks to him, seduces him into Eden with beautiful words, and addresses him with both permissions and restrictions concerning the trees from which he may eat. Further, in assigning *ha adam* the task of naming animals, God in effect asks him a question: What strikes or impresses you about each living creature and what would you call them? In these ways, God acknowledges *ha adam* as a speaker. He shows him that he can, and should, use his own voice and that He welcomes what he will say.

God does not similarly invite the woman into language. He first addresses her in anger after the man blames her for his eating forbidden fruit: “What is this you have done!” (3:13). God leaves it to the man to invite the woman into language and, as we have seen, he fails to do so. However, the fact that God entrusts him with this responsibility suggests two important points about God’s vision of, and wishes for, conversation between the pair. First, even while they are in Eden and closely connected with God, they are to be in conversation primarily with one another. It is to one another that they should call out their experiences of themselves and their world, address their questions, and declare their desires. They should, in short, turn primarily to one another, rather than to God, for companionship. Second, in turning to one another, they are to draw one another into continuously evolving conversation. Their sameness as human allows for a ground of mutuality, while their differences as man and woman challenge them to cultivate and extend that ground; inspiring perpetually

renewed interest in one another and in how their perspectives both differ and align. Conversation, then, becomes a matter of endlessly seducing one another into further reaches of world and experience they can share. Call this ongoing seduction a vision of marriage as "meet and happy conversation." It is the vision Milton found in Genesis 2 and it is the vision Cavell finds exemplified in remarriage comedy and that systematically informs his moral perfectionism.

11. Epilogue: Breaking Primal Unity and Entering the Uninstructed Ways

But at the close of Genesis 2, there is no such conversation in view. The pair's unashamed nakedness shows they can find pleasure together, but the man's speech has cast the woman into silence and, more consequentially, driven her to separate from him and assert her independence. These steps, often seen as leading to the precipice from which the man and woman will tragically fall, are both necessary and fruitful.

Considering this part of the Genesis narrative, Zornberg observes that "Adam and Eve become fully human only when a primal single-mindedness—one with God, one with each other—gives way to the separate minds, the separate desires, of man, woman, and God."[32] The events of Genesis 3 trace this breaking of primal single-mindedness and show that creating the kinds of separateness and connectedness that enable productive relationships is a complex, always ongoing, human task. If *ha adam* and the man were the primary drivers of human development in Genesis 2, it is now the woman who takes the lead as she acts to bring herself to life and establish her own existence. Her actions deprive the pair of the tranquil ease of Eden, but they also serve the pair's further development into their humanity.

When we next see the woman, she stands apart from the man in conversation with a serpent. It is the serpent who invites her into language and does so very much as God had done with *ha adam*. The serpent addresses her, speaks to her rather than about her, and asks her a question: "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" (3:1). These gestures acknowledge the woman as a speaker who is

32. Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep*, 13.

able, and expected, to speak for herself. In doing so, they reveal the woman to herself as a free and independent being and so prepare her consideration of the forbidden fruit—"that the tree was good for eating and a delight for the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom" (3:6). Irrespective of whether she ultimately eats, it is in this consideration that she begins to establish herself as an autonomous agent and to break the primal unity with God and with the man.

However, the turns in this tale of eating show how complicated establishing the necessary kind and degree of separateness can be. With respect to breaking union with God, the woman's decision to eat creates separation by violating a command, but it is also motivated, at least in part, by a desire to draw nearer to God through possessing His knowledge of good and bad. Indeed, God's alarm at the pair's transgressive eating is directed less at their violating His command then at their greater likeness to Him: "And the Lord God said: 'Now that the human has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!'" (3:22). This is not God jealously guarding His power but, most generally, His blocking union that would impede human development. More specifically, He is protecting the humans from an immortality He knows they may desire but could not endure.

With respect to breaking union with the man, I have already suggested that the woman's need for both physical and intellectual separateness from him drives her into conversation with the serpent. Similarly, her desire for divine wisdom must be understood as motivated, at least in part, by a wish to escape subordination by the man. However, her goal in seeking separateness is not to produce isolation but to establish the independence that will enable conversation among equals. Hence, having eaten the fruit, the woman "gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat" (3:6). That is, she invites the man to join her in an expansion of their shared experience. He accepts immediately. However, his earlier moves to incorporate the woman and his anxiety in the face of her independent voice suggest that his motives in taking the fruit are mixed. He may be motivated by a desire to open new vistas of shared experience. But he is likely also motivated by a need to close the space between them that her eating has created. That is, beyond welcoming new ranges of experience, he may also be driven to ensure that the woman has no experience that is not his as well.

If the woman eats because she wants to know what God knows, the man, it seems, eats because he needs to know what the woman knows.

Perhaps moved by pity in witnessing these tangled human efforts, God Himself intervenes to help break the primal unity between the man and woman as well as between the pair and Himself. This can be seen as the purpose of the so-called curses God places on the disobedient man and woman. The individual curses on the man and woman separate them from one another by articulating their distinct roles and burdens (3:16–19) and the shared curses of mortality and expulsion from Eden separate the humans from God (3:23–24). While I cannot fully engage the complexities of these notoriously vexed verses, I want to touch on one aspect of a gender dynamic they can seem to suggest.

Along with announcing the promise of children, albeit by declaring pain in delivery, God tells the woman: "your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (3:16).[33] This sounds bad, as though God is joining the man in consigning the woman to a subordinate position. However, the sting of sexism modern readers are bound to feel in this remark is significantly relieved, although not entirely removed, by considering its context. The woman has separated from the man, joined in conversation with the serpent, sought divine wisdom, and has now been told she will have children. Against this background, God's declaration that "your desire shall be for your husband" redirects the woman's attention back toward the man. It tells her that they are (to become) fitting companions and insists that it is primarily with the man—not with other creatures, not directly with God, and not even with her children—that she is to chart her course into humanity. Similarly, in saying "he shall rule over you" God is not granting the man a right to rule but confirming what the woman has already seen and offering a helpful warning. The man, He tells her, is driven to dominate and this is a drive with which, and against which, she will have to contend.

The man's response to these curses, the final human act of Genesis 3, gives reason for hope. He again engages in an unsolicited act of naming. This time, however, he reverses his earlier claim to be the source of the woman and, instead, credits her with an essential priority: "The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all the living" (3:20). This does not simply claim that Eve *will be* the moth-

33. I have modified the JPS translation by using "desire" rather than "urge."

er of all to come, it identifies her now as the mother of all living which, at this point, includes only the man and woman. This naming, then, recognizes the woman and her actions as having brought them both to human life. In place of *ha adam's* demigod like inspiration by the breath of God, they will both now draw their inspiration from one another. Indeed, as Zornberg emphasizes, this act of naming celebrates the woman's having introduced them, and all who come after, into a radically transfigured world. Eve, she claims, "has brought Adam into a world of uncertainty and agitation, of process and risk" in which his "sovereign relation to his world and its meanings yields to her enigmatic vitality: 'The essence of life flows to him from her'."[34]

At the close of Genesis 3, the human journey has just begun. But it is, increasingly, a *human* journey. Expelled from Eden and birthed into their vitally uncertain and agitated world, the pair enter upon what Kass calls "the uninstructed ways."[35] God offers no instruction about how to survive, how to raise children, how to navigate the inevitable tempests of their relationship, or about any ideal of the well-lived life toward which they should aspire. They are placed in one another's care and must look to one another for whatever instruction and inspiration they will find. This absence of set instructions, with its inescapable demand for invention and improvisation, is one of the deep terrors of human life. But, with a fitting companion, it is also a great part of its joy. Let us wish them well.[36]

34. Zornberg, *The Murmuring Deep*, 24, quoting the 19th century scholar Rabbi Yaacov Leiner.
35. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 64.
36. I am grateful to Amy and Leon Kass—a pair of fitting companions who first introduced me to the pleasures and rewards of reading Genesis.