

CREATOR & CREATION



Chapter Five

In the Beginning

The Creation Myths

The Present in the Beginning and the End

The ancient Israelites' values toward nature are made most explicit through their myths of the beginning and the end. These myths specifically address the triangular relationship between God, humans, and the natural world. Thus they provide a final yet necessary resource for our investigation of the Israelites' values toward nature and the worldview in which they are rooted.

Although myths of the beginning and the end are ostensibly placed on a temporal continuum, referring to the past and the future respectively, the significance of these myths is focused on the present (van der Leeuw; Pettazzoni: 29; Westermann, 1972). In other words, these myths are about the present values and conditions of the people who generated them rather than the obscure past or the unknown future. Not all readers of these myths, however, have recognized their present orientation. In part, this is due to a failure by many readers to recognize the mythic character of the Bible's stories and descriptions of the beginning and the end. But more important, many if not most readers of the Bible – scholars and laity alike – have failed to distinguish between their own temporal orientation and the temporal orientation of traditional societies, including ancient Israel.

All cross-cultural studies, which of course includes the study of the Bible by twentieth century Westerners, must take into account cultural differences concerning the perception of time in order to avoid ethnocentrism and misunderstanding (Maines). Some biblical scholars have therefore attempted to distinguish between the ancient Israelites' view of time and the modern view of time inherited from the Greeks. Based primarily on linguistic evidence, numerous scholars have argued that the Israelites emphasized the *content* of time whereas the Greeks emphasized the *chronological sequence* of time (Boman). According to this distinction, time for the ancient Israelites was infused with substance and identical to that substance. Time was thought to be simply an empty frame of reference that was filled with events. For example, there were times of harvesting, times of planting, times of war, times of raising children, times of death, times of sorrow, times of joy, and times of peace. In each case, time was characterized by the events that filled it (Pedersen: 487–88; Černy: 4–7; Rust).

This characterization of the Israelite perception of time, however, does not stand up to close examination. On the one hand, the linguistic arguments marshaled to distinguish Israelite from Greek views of time are fallacious (Barr, 1961, 1969; Momigliano). On the other hand, detailed studies of biblical words for time have demonstrated that they do in fact denote chronological sequence (Wilch; DeVries): Hebrew words for time signify both quantitative (chronological sequence) and qualitative (content) aspects with little variance from Greek vocabulary.

A more promising approach for distinguishing between ancient Israelite and modern Western views of time is available through Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's model of value orientation preferences (Malina, 1989a). As with the human-relationship-to-nature problem, this model enables us to categorize possible cultural solutions to the common human problem regarding the temporal-focus-of-human-life: What temporal focus – past, present, or future – forms the framework for solutions to the vital problems of human life? Although this model does not enable us to discern what is unique about Israelite or Western perceptions of time (with no informants to question, the peculiar features of Israel's view of time have probably been lost to history), it does differentiate between the fundamental temporal values of each culture.

In the United States and other Western countries the overwhelming first order preference to this problem is the future-orientation solution. For the majority of Westerners, all human problems can be solved through appropriate future actions. Human goals are placed in the future, and the activity in the present is simply the means by which those goals will be achieved. The future is neither random nor determined, but as the continuation of the present, it can be affected by personal choices. An American axiom is that each one has control over his or her own future. The future for Americans is the motivation for all that happens in the present. We act in the present in order to shape our future. The present, in contrast, is limited to a single moment facing an unlimited future, and is itself instantaneously becoming the past. Now is an ever changing moment in time's relentless march into the future.

Although future-orientation is the dominant value preference of Westerners, it is a minority preference in the global community. This is primarily because, according to the analysis of James M. Jones, a future orientation is dependent upon two cultural factors: the belief that if a specific act is performed in the present, the probability of some future goal will be greater; and the tendency to value goals whose attainment can only occur in the future. A necessary prerequisite for these cultural factors, however, is that the survival needs of the present – food, water, shelter, clothing, protection – must be assured. People are unlikely to be concerned about the future until their own survival in the present is secured (Jones). It is therefore not surprising that the future-orientation solution is the dominant preference of U.S. Americans. Our high level of technology and affluent standard of living afford us the luxury to strive for goals in the future. But equally important, we have the means by which to achieve those goals, and by so doing, reinforce our future orientation.

In contrast to the United States, many societies in the world today and most traditional societies prefer the present-orientation solution to the temporal-focus-of-human-life problem. In a present oriented society, a person's present activity is aimed at achieving

proximate goals. The present is the duration of everyday experiences. It is made up of all forthcoming and recent events; it is not simply a single moment in the course of time. “The immediate future bound up with present as well as previous activity still resonating in the present are all part of that present, still experienced and all actually present” (Malina, 1989a: 12). According to the present-orientation solution, the present is like a line segment rather than a point. The present encompasses a range of human experiences: all that one has experienced in the past relative to what one is currently experiencing and what one is about to experience as a result of the past and the present. Together, this range of experience forms a single, ongoing context of meaning known as the present.

If the present according to this orientation is *experienced* time, then the remote past and the distant future are *imaginary* time (Bourdieu: 60–61; Malina, 1989a: 11–17). Imaginary time is outside the scope of current human experience, and as such, is not subject to the constraints of experienced time. Stories and accounts that take place during experienced time are judged to be true according to their correlation with actual human experiences. In an imaginary world, on the other hand, all things are possible; truth is not limited to human experience. Imaginary time is the time of monsters and mythological creatures, heroes and heroic exploits, miracles and disruptions of the rhythms of nature. From the perspective of the Israelites, imaginary time was the exclusive domain of God. The possible world of the past and the future is made possible by God, but because it belongs to the domain of God, the past and the future as possible worlds “cannot belong and never will belong to human beings” (Malina, 1989a: 15). In other words, humans live and must live in the present. To do otherwise would be tantamount to assuming divine prerogatives.

Experienced time and imaginary time differ not only in their criteria of truthfulness but also in their function (Malina, 1989a: 24–28). Experienced time is similar to operational time. It is repetitive time, marked by regular intervals, during which the tasks of life – working, eating, sleeping, playing – are carried out. As a result, operational time is primarily subject to environmental constraints. The times of planting and harvesting, for example, are determined by the ecological conditions of a region. Times of eating and defecating are necessitated by the biological demands of the human body. For the cultures surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, warfare and other extended outside activities were conducted only during the dry summer months. The rainy winter months were typically a period of reduced outside activity (Boissevain).

Imaginary time, on the other hand, is similar to historical time. It is “concerned with the ordering of events or periods in the life of an individual or a society, which are of contemporary significance” (Rayner: 256). Historical time gives warrant to the present society by projecting present concerns and aspirations onto the past and the future. Historical time is the world of the possible; it is subject to social rather than environmental constraints. Traditional cultures turn to historical time in order to explain certain customs, such as Israel’s redemption of the first born child from sacrifice (Gen 22:1–18; Exod 13:11–16), or to justify social demands, such as that Israel should follow the laws of the covenant (compare the numerous examples of God’s past benevolence on behalf of Israel and the prophetic warnings of God’s coming judgment when Israel transgresses the laws).

Ancient Israel was predominantly a present oriented society, and the Bible's myths of the beginning and the end reflect imaginary-historical time. They present an imaginative world that is out of sync with human experience. They describe a world in which humans and animals issue from the ground, fruit endows one with life and knowledge, snakes talk, mountains flow with milk and wine, the desert is watered and blossoms, and the lamb and the lion lie down together. Although these myths do not describe the concrete world of Israel's experience, they do present a picture of the social fabric of ancient Israel. Israel's remote past and future were constructed in order to explain, justify, and reinforce Israel's own present social values, customs, and demands. In this way, the biblical myths of the beginning and the end (the latter to be discussed in Chapter Six) serve to inform us about ancient Israel's values concerning the natural world and the role of humans in relationship to it, and so further illustrate the Israelite worldview.

The Yahwist Creation Myth

The two biblical creation myths are rich in tradition and symbolism and lend themselves to multifaceted interpretations, as the voluminous secondary literature on these myths attests. For our purposes, the interpretation of these myths will focus on how they function *as myths*, that is, as vehicles for communicating the fundamental values of ancient Israelite society. We are less concerned with, for instance, how these myths might have served political ideologies (Wyatt, 1981; Holter) or religious polemics (Hasel, 1972, 1974; Kapelrud, 1974; Soggin: 88–111). Therefore, our analysis will accentuate the interrelationship between God, humans, and the natural world that is disclosed through the metaphors and structure of the myths.

Creation Inside the Garden: Genesis 2:4b–25

Creation in the Bible is never creation *ex nihilo*, “from nothing.” This doctrine was not formulated until the Hellenistic age, to which the first reference is 2 Maccabees 7:28. In the biblical tradition, and in the ancient Near East in general, God always works with some material that is either primordial or simply already there when God begins to create, though the ancient Israelites would not have made this distinction (Andersen: 140–41). As discussed in Chapters Two and Three, God creates either through establishing order and fixing boundaries, usually by separating a primordial substance, or through the natural physical processes of birth and growth. In the Yahwist creation myth the earth itself is primordial. God never creates the earth, but the earth without God's creative activity is barren and lifeless.

In typical ancient Near Eastern fashion, the Yahwist creation myth begins by describing that which is absent at the beginning of creation (compare the beginning of the *Enuma Elish* and the myth of *Enki and Ninbursaq*): The earth exists as a dry, sterile desert, with no plants or vegetation because God has not yet created rain, and because there is no human to till the ground (2:5). This outlines the purpose of God's creative activity – to create rain and humans to till the ground so that the earth will produce life. In contrast to the negative aspects of creation, the text states positively that there is a spring that swells up from the

earth to water the ground (2:6).¹ From this spring flows a river which branches into four rivers, two of which are the great rivers of Mesopotamia, the Tigris and the Euphrates (2:10–14). The setting of creation that is being described is the Mesopotamian plain (Batto, 1992: 49; contra Meyers: 83) which is dependent upon irrigation in order to sustain life. The earth has the potential for life; the subterranean waters can be harnessed in order to make the ground fertile. Yet without humans to till the ground and channel the water into irrigation ditches, the Mesopotamian plain remains lifeless (Wenham: 59).

After describing the setting of creation, through an elaborate set of temporal clauses, the emphasis of the myth falls on God's first act of creation: God formed the human creature (*'adam*) from the dust (in the sense of dry earth, dirt) of the ground (*'adama*), breathed into its nostrils the breath of life, and the human creature became a living being (2:7).² Scholars have frequently noted that God's creation of the human creature evokes the image of a potter who "forms" a vessel on the wheel. In particular, a number of scholars have compared Yahweh in this context with the Egyptian creator-god Khnum who fashions humans on his potter's wheel (Gordon, 1982: 203–4; Hoffmeier: 47; Westermann, 1984: 203). Indeed, this comparison is correct. But just as Khnum's work as a potter should be understood within the context of the birth process – the potter's fashioning of a clay vessel is analogous to the creator-god's fashioning of the fetus in the womb (see the discussion in Chapter Two) – so also Yahweh's forming of the human creature from the dirt of the ground serves as a metaphor for humankind's birth out of the earth (contra Wolff, 1974a: 93). The potter metaphor is simply an abstraction of the birth metaphor. Yahweh acts as a potter who forms the human fetus in the womb of the earth, and then Yahweh acts as a midwife by delivering the human creature out of the earth (cf. Benjamin: 119). Yahweh's role in animating the human creature by breathing into its nostrils can be compared to the birth-goddess Heket who is frequently pictured inserting the *ankh*, the sign of life, into the nostrils of those whom Khnum fashioned on the wheel (Gordon, 1982: 204). With the crucial aid of Yahweh, the earth at last is able to produce life.

The creation of the human creature emphasizes the connection between humankind and the earth. Humans have their origin in the ground, and as Genesis 3:19 makes explicit, humans will return to the ground at death. The Yahwist further accentuates this connection through the pun *'adam* - *'adama*. The human creature is characterized by the ground from which it came. In connecting the human creature with the earth, however, the Yahwist is not making a statement about biological origins. The significance of the correlation between the human creature and the earth is metaphorical and not biological. By connecting humans to the earth, the Yahwist counters all attempts by humans to transcend their creaturely status. Humans are of earth, not of heaven, and so their fate is bound to the earth.

¹ On the debated interpretation of this spring, see the linguistic analysis of Albright (1939: 102-3), Speiser (1955), Westermann (1984: 200-201), and Andersen (137-40). Compare the interpretation of Tsumura (93-116).

² The Hebrew term can refer to the human species or the gendered human man. In the first half of the myth (2:4b-24), refers to the undifferentiated human species, and so has been translated as "human creature." In the second half of the myth (2:25-3:24), refers to the individual who results from the human creature after differentiation is introduced, and so in this case has been translated as "man." Of course, also becomes the personal name of the first man, Adam.

The primordial earth remained barren because it lacked two ingredients necessary to sustain life: rain and human labor. Therefore, God first forms a human creature from the dust of the ground. Oddly, God does not proceed to create rain. No rain will fall on the earth until God creates the flood-rains in Genesis 7:4. Nor does the human creature, who was created to till the ground, cultivate the barren landscape. Rather, God plants a garden in Eden which is located in the east (from Israel, that is, in Mesopotamia). Just as God brought the human creature out of the earth, so God causes the earth to produce every kind of fruit tree (2:9). The water that is needed to sustain the garden is undoubtedly supplied by the river that flows out of the garden. In his garden Yahweh places the human creature and assigns him the task of tending and preserving it.

The fact that God planted the garden rather than the human creature suggests that the garden was not intended to be the dwelling place of humans. After all, the garden of Eden is the garden of *God*. Humans were created to till the ground, and in this manner bring life to the sterile desert. This is their destiny, and the earth outside the garden will be their dwelling. But just as children must remain in the house of their parents until they reach maturity, so also the human creature is placed temporarily in the garden of God.

Although the human creature is never specifically described as a king, a few scholars have identified a number of royal attributes which the Yahwist ascribes to the human creature. The garden, for example, might serve as an indication of the human creature's royal status. The garden of Eden is presented as a formal pleasure garden, characteristic of the royal gardens of ancient Near Eastern kings (Wyatt, 1981: 14–15; Hutter; Coote and Ord, 1989: 50–54). The human creature's task in the garden is the work (one might even say "hobby") of kings. It is not the back-breaking, sweating toil of farming, but rather the leisurely pruning and manicuring of a self-sustaining perennial garden. The garden of Eden is a paradise in the original use of the term ("paradise" was first used by Xenophon to refer to the pleasure gardens of Persian kings and nobles).

Similarly, Walter Brueggemann has identified the creation formula, "the LORD God formed the human creature from the dust of the ground" (2:7), as a royal formula of enthronement. The parade example of the royal formula is found in 1 Kings 16:2: "Since I exalted you [Baasha] out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel . . ." Dust serves as a metaphor in this text for Baasha's pre-royal status, which apparently was the status of a commoner with non-royal lineage. Elsewhere, dust directly serves as the antithesis to royal status in 1 Samuel 2:6–8 and Psalm 113:7, and is implied in numerous other passages. Applying this metaphorical interpretation to Genesis 2, Brueggemann concludes:

Adam, in Gen 2, is really being crowned king over the garden with all the power and authority which it implies. This is the fundamental statement about man made by J. He is willed by God to occupy a royal office. . . . *Thus creation of man is in fact enthronement of man* (12).

Without denying that a paradisiacal garden has royal connotations or that dust may serve metaphorically as an enthronement formula, neither of these interpretations fits the Yahwist's narrative. The human creature does not function as a king in his garden. Rather, the garden belongs to God who assigns the human creature a task in the garden and sets

limits on the creature's enjoyment of the garden. God functions as the king in the Yahwist's myth.

A comparison between Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 28:12–19 is appropriate in this context. In contrast to Genesis 2, the latter text describes the creation of a primordial king in the garden of Eden. He is specifically identified as a king, and there are references to his wisdom and beauty and his regalia which are characteristic of kings. The similarities between these texts have frequently been observed, but the relationship between these two texts is problematic. In both passages the created being is placed in the garden of Eden from which he is expelled after he claims divine prerogatives. If one text is not directly dependent upon the other, at least a common tradition underlying both texts seems undeniable. In any case, the explicit references to the royal attributes of the king in Ezekiel 28 suggests that the royal ideology belonged to the tradition. The Yahwist has simply transformed the creation of the primordial king into the creation of the primordial human (compare van Seters, 1989; 1992: 120–21). The royal attributes identified in Genesis 2 are remnants of traditional material from which the Yahwist constructed his narrative.

In the garden of Eden God plants two trees of note, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:9). The former tree is only mentioned twice in the narrative, at the beginning and the end (3:22), and thus scholars have commonly assumed that it was a remnant from an earlier myth or the Yahwist's source material. There have been some scholars, however, who have observed the thematically important role of immortality in this myth, suggesting that the tree of life is integral to the narrative (Hutton; Barr, 1992). The presence of the tree of life in the garden assumes that the human creature is mortal, for the tree offers the creature the opportunity of immortality. Whether the human creature is aware of its mortality, on the other hand, is a different issue that is dependent upon the interpretation of the tree of knowledge. Although the human creature can eat from every other tree in the garden, including the tree of life, the fruit of the tree of knowledge is specifically off-limits. God prohibits the human creature from eating its fruit with the threat that "in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (2:17).

Initially, the human creature is the only living being in the garden. Recognizing that it is not good for humans to be alone, Yahweh attempts to create, literally, "a helper corresponding to it" (2:18). So just as God formed the human creature out of the ground, God forms all the animals and the birds in similar fashion. God then brings each newly formed creature to the human in order to see what it would name the creature, but the human creature finds no helper corresponding to it (2:19–20). Leaving aside the function of naming, the Yahwist myth emphasizes that humans are similar to the animals and the birds in both substance and method of their creation. All living beings, regardless of species, make up the genus of creature; none are divine. For this reason, God hopes to find a suitable helper for the human from among other creatures. But God fails in his task; no companion for the human can be formed out of the ground.

A great deal of discussion has centered around the human creature's role in naming all the animals and birds. For some interpreters, naming becomes a symbol of human dominance and control over the creation. Naming, it is claimed, demonstrates the superiority of humans over other creatures (Wenham: 68), and is comparable to the Priestly writer's

statement that humans should exercise dominion over all the creatures of the earth (von Rad, 1972a: 82–83; Westermann, 1984: 228–29). Thus Lynn White suggested that the positive value ascribed to the human creature's naming of the animals justifies human exploitation of nature (1205). Although White has been accused of being critically illiterate because he has blurred together the P and the J creation myths – connecting naming with dominion – thus obscuring each (Hiers: 45), White has simply drawn out the implications of what biblical scholars had already stated. But scholars have misinterpreted the significance of name-giving. It does not signal human superiority or human dominance over animals. Both of these attributes are lacking in the Yahwist's narrative. Rather, in the myth name-giving is placed in the context of finding a *suitable* helper for the human creature. The significance of name-giving must be understood in this context. “If the act of naming signifies anything about the name-giver, it is the quality of *discernment*” (Ramsey: 34). By naming the animals and birds the human creature distinguishes between those creatures that are suitable for a human helper and those that are not (Magonet: 40–41). But no creature is found that corresponds to the human.

Because God is unable to form a suitable helper for the human creature from the ground, God splits the human creature (*'adam*) in order to create two complementary individuals (Trible, 1978: 94–105): man (*'ish*) and woman (*'ishsha*). God puts the human creature into a comatose state (Meyers: 84), takes one of its ribs, and from the rib builds a woman (2:21–22). Prior to this new creation, the human creature was undifferentiated with regard to gender, being either asexual (neither male nor female) or androgynous (both male and female). By splitting the human creature, God introduces differentiation into the human species, but the terms used to describe this differentiation are explicitly social in orientation rather than sexual (Coote and Ord, 1989: 57). The man is identified foremost as a husband, the woman as a wife. The specific social roles of each individual, however, are not outlined until the second half of the myth. At this point in the myth the Yahwist simply notes that their complementary social roles find fulfillment in the institution of marriage (Hutton: 129): By uniting in marriage, the man and the woman restore the one flesh from which they originated (2:24).

The statement that the man and the woman are naked yet they do not shame each other (Sasson) serves as a point of transition between the two parts of the myth (2:25). On the one hand, it continues to describe the status of the human couple in the garden of Eden. The implication of this statement is that the human couple is sexually unaware. In other words, they do not know that the union of their bodies has the potential to produce new life. They are like children unacquainted with the biological and cultural significance of their bodies, and so their nakedness means nothing to them. On the other hand, this statement introduces those characteristics of the human couple that serve as the focus of the second half of the myth.

Creation Outside the Garden: Genesis 3

The second half of the Yahwist creation myth has traditionally been termed the “Fall,” with attention given to the human acts of disobedience against God (beginning, of course, with Paul's own interpretation of the story in Romans 5, 1 Corinthians 15, and 1 Timothy 2). However, recent scholars have begun to question this theological interpretation of the myth

for a variety of reasons. First, although the human couple disregards God's command by eating the forbidden fruit, this act is never called "sin" (Scullion, 1974: 6–7). "Interpreters may label this act as disobedient; exegetes may consider it sinful. But *God* does not provide such a judgment within either the narration or the discourse of Genesis 3" (Meyers: 87). The first reference to sin in the Bible is in Genesis 4:7, in the context of Cain's murder of Abel. Second, the Old Testament itself never characterizes this story as a Fall. For this reason, the Jewish tradition has preferred to characterize this narrative as the human expulsion from the garden rather than as the Fall (Barr, 1992: 4–20). But most important, this theological interpretation fails to account adequately for the change of status of the human couple.

According to the first part of the Yahwist's myth, the human couple lives in an unreal world (Carmichael: 47–54; Amit): Humans, animals, and birds alike are born out of the earth. There is no differentiation between humans and other creatures. The woman is created out of the "man." The human couple is naked like the animals and has no awareness of sexual differentiation. And the human couple live a leisurely life in a pleasure garden planted by God with the possibility of immortality. This is not the world of human experience! As appealing as paradise might be, this is not the world in which humans live, nor is it the world in which humans prefer to live. The archetypal man and woman³ are analogous to children engaging in a rite of passage (Niditch: 31–34). In the first part of the myth they are presented in the unreal world of liminality – the stage of transition between childhood and adulthood, for example (V. Turner: 95–97). All humans must eventually mature into adults. To remain in childhood indefinitely is tantamount to denying one's own humanity, for only in adulthood do humans find their fulfillment. For this reason, the human couple is not content to live in the status quo world of the garden of Eden. As humans, the man and woman inevitably mature. Yet the human couple's adult status is incompatible with life in the garden. Rather than being their natural home, the garden of Eden simply serves as the liminal setting for their rite of passage (Hutton: 136–37). Through their acts in the garden, the man and woman are transformed into real humans living in a real world. The second half of the Yahwist creation myth is all about this transformation.

In the second half of the myth a new character is introduced: the serpent. Just as this part of the myth is not about the "Fall" of humankind, so also the snake is not the Devil or Satan. This common interpretation is the result of later Christian readings of this story as a foreshadowing of the Christ event, but such an interpretation is foreign to the Old Testament itself. The serpent is simply one of the creatures that God formed out of the ground. Specifically, the serpent is identified as the most "crafty" (a Hebrew pun on the word "naked") of all the creatures that God had made (3:1). In the ancient Near East, the serpent was a symbol of both immortality and wisdom (Joines: 16–41). The serpent thus stands in contrast to the human couple, who are also "naked," but who are neither immortal nor wise.

Through a dialogue with the woman, the serpent challenges the human couple's child-like obedience to God (3:1–5). God prohibited the humans from eating the fruit of the tree

³ The man and woman are archetypes in that they represent the essential features of human life that all ancient Israelites experienced (Meyers, 1988: 80-81).

of knowledge with the threat of death, but God offered no rationale for the prohibition. Like children, the human couple simply follow God's command without question. But for the wise serpent, who knew God's rationale, the prohibition makes little sense. Therefore, the serpent discloses God's rationale to the human couple: God did not want the human couple to be like the gods, knowing good and evil (3:5). Moreover, the serpent recognizes God's threat of death as empty. The humans are already mortal; they will eventually die regardless of the prohibition. (The serpent might have reasoned that once the human couple had knowledge of their own mortality, they would eat the fruit of the tree of life and gain immortality. It should be noted that in the dialogue with the woman, the serpent tells the truth. The humans become like the gods, and they do not die.) The serpent's case against God's prohibition is persuasive to the human couple. They eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge (3:6) and become aware of their nakedness. But because their nakedness is now shameful to them, they cover their genitals with fig leaves (3:7).

Much of the interpretation of Genesis 3 hinges on the meaning of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and what its fruit provides for the human couple. Unfortunately, the number of proposed interpretations of this tree and its significance is roughly equivalent to the number of scholars who have studied it (a good summary and critique of most of the proposals is given by Westermann, 1984: 242–45; Wallace, 1985: 115–32). The context suggests that the knowledge of good and evil must have something to do with the human couple's awareness of sexuality: Before they eat the fruit the couple is sexually unaware (they are naked yet not ashamed), but after they eat the fruit they are aware of their sexual nature (they know they are naked and thus cover their genitals). The knowledge of good and evil, then, must entail the knowledge of sexuality. Indeed, the Yahwist uses knowledge as a euphemism for sexual intimacy, especially in reference to Adam and his son: "Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain" (Gen 4:1); "Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch" (Gen 4:17); "Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth" (Gen 4:25). The knowledge of good and evil, however, is not sexual knowledge *in this sense*. The context of Genesis 3 precludes the possibility of actual sexual relations between the man and the woman. They are not aware of their sexuality until *after* they gain the knowledge of good and evil.

Many scholars have correctly argued that the expression "knowledge of good and evil" is a merism⁴ for universal knowledge. In other words, this expression is equivalent to "all knowledge from A to Z." More specifically, in the context of the Yahwist myth this knowledge is what distinguishes humans from the rest of the created beings, and so can appropriately be termed "cultural knowledge" (Wellhausen: 302; Oden, 1981: 213). According to the first part of this creation myth, humans are made of the same substance as the animals, birds, and the earth itself. This homology between humans and the rest of creation is expected. The ancient Near Eastern creation model posits a microcosm/macrocosm relationship between humans and the earth. Yet humans in the real world are also distinct from the earth and the rest of creation. They must be differentiated from the earth from which they came. In many of the Mesopotamian creation myths this is

⁴ *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* defines "merism" as a figure of speech in which "a totality is expressed by two constitutive parts." See the discussion and examples given by Honeyman.

accomplished with divine blood: Humans are created from clay that is mixed with the blood of a slain god. For the Yahwist, the knowledge of good and evil serves this purpose. By acquiring knowledge, the man and woman gain the potential for culture; they are now able to distinguish themselves from the rest of creation.

The connection between the cultural knowledge acquired by the human couple and their new sexual awareness is this: Culture is founded upon the human ability to create. The man and woman have become like the gods which is symbolized by their knowledge of their ability to create new life for themselves. Sexuality serves as the catalyst for the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood (van Gennep: 67). Whereas God had previously caused the earth to produce vegetable and animal life – hitherto divine prerogatives – the human couple gain knowledge of their ability to create like God by eating the forbidden fruit (Oden, 1981: 213; Coote and Ord, 1989: 55). The man now knows to sow seed in the woman and by extension in the earth to create new life (Eilberg-Schwartz: 161). Cultural knowledge also introduces a division of labor into the relationship between the man and the women. The woman will bear children; the man will till the ground and plant crops (Coote and Ord, 1989: 60). Through eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the humans are transformed from creatures of nature into creatures of culture.⁵

Because the man and the woman ate from the forbidden tree at the serpent's prompting, and thereby became creators themselves, Yahweh describes the consequences of the human couple's actions that will affect each of them. These consequences have traditionally been labeled "curses," but only the serpent (and by extension the rest of the animal kingdom) and the ground are explicitly cursed. The man and the woman are not cursed yet must suffer the consequences of their actions. These negative consequences have also been interpreted as divine punishment, but this understanding does not fully account for their ambiguous nature. On the one hand, these consequences inevitably result from the human couple's actions (Naidoff: 10). The consequences reflect the occasionally painful reality of adulthood. On the other hand, the text suggests that God plays an active role in the enactment of these consequences. Specifically, it appears that God intensifies the consequences that the man and the woman must suffer. Only in this qualified sense can these consequences be interpreted as God's punishment.

In contrast to the human couple who disregarded God's command, the serpent is explicitly cursed by God. The serpent committed no sin against God; it only revealed the truth to the human couple. Yet because of its actions, it must slither on its belly and eat dust (3:14). This curse undoubtedly served as an etiology, an explanation, of the peculiar locomotion and character of snakes. Such creatures could not have "naturally" been so unusual; they must have done something to end up that way (Meyers: 88).⁶

⁵ A striking parallel to the transformation of the human couple is present in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Enkidu is created out of clay and lives like a wild animal. However, through a sexual encounter with a harlot, he is transformed into a civilized man. The harlot's response to Enkidu's transformation highlights the parallel: "You have become [wise] Enkidu, you have become like a god" (Dalley: 56).

⁶ Propp suggests that this curse implies that the serpent was originally thought to be a lizard (1990: 195).

Although the curse is directed toward the serpent primarily, the serpent is symbolic of all animals – domestic and wild. Because the serpent persuaded the humans to eat the fruit of knowledge, the harmony between humans and animals is disrupted. Cultural knowledge brings differentiation between humans and animals, and this differentiation results in enmity (3:15). For the serpent, this enmity takes the form of a constant battle with the woman, but this is symbolic of the enmity between humans and animals that is presumed by culture. Humans will no longer recognize animals as fellow creatures, but sources of food, clothing, and labor. Similarly, animals will not recognize humans as one of their own kind, and thus will bolt from them or attack them.

The consequences that affect the woman entail pain in bearing children and subordination to the man (3:16). With knowledge the woman can create human life like God. The man names her Eve because she will be the mother of all living, a role previously belonging to God (3:20). The task of creating life, however, is inherently painful. Moreover, the myth suggests that God will make childbearing even more painful than it naturally would have been. Many female creatures bear their offspring, but only the woman will suffer such great pains in childbirth. In the first part of the Yahwist creation myth, the woman was differentiated from the man in order to be a suitable helper for him. The human couple was presented as a socially complementary unit, but the social role of each was not specified. Having acquired cultural knowledge, however, the woman recognizes her social role to be concerned primarily with childbearing. Her cultural activity will be in the domestic sphere: bearing and raising children, preparation of food, and the management of the household economy – though during labor-intensive times such as the harvest, the woman will also need to work in the fields (Meyers: 139–64).

With regard to bearing children, the woman will be subject to the “rule” of the man. In other words, the statement, “he shall rule over you” (3:16), must be understood in the context of the woman’s task of bearing children (Meyers: 113–17; Coote and Ord, 1989: 63). This statement does not constitute a general assertion of male dominance over women! It is culturally specific. In ancient Israel the husband could demand that his wife bear him children. The bearing of many children was essential in order to overcome the high mortality rate and still provide enough laborers to maintain subsistence. In order to ensure an adequately large family over against the woman’s possible reluctance to bear children – many women in the ancient world died in childbirth, resulting in a significantly reduced life expectancy from that of a man (Meyers: 112–13) – the man could demand sexual relations with his wife. However, because the woman’s “desire” will be for her husband, such “rule” by the husband will not be considered oppressive.

Through the acquisition of cultural knowledge, the man recognizes his primary role in subsistence. By tilling the ground and cultivating crops, the man will provide food for his family. No longer will the man be able to gather food leisurely from God’s garden; he must sweat and toil in agricultural labor. This is the task for which man was created. But the man’s labor will be especially severe because the ground is cursed because of him: The ground will only produce thorns and thistles (3:17–18). In contrast to the consequences that the woman experiences, God does not intensify the pain and suffering that the man will experience. Rather, the man will suffer the hostility of the ground because God has not yet caused rain to fall on the earth (2:5). The ground will remain cursed without rain as a result of the man’s

actions, but this curse will come to an end with the flood. Because the man has acquired cultural knowledge and now knows how to provide for his own subsistence, he will be forced out of the garden to eke out an existence in the barren desert that is the earth.

Although the man and the woman differentiated themselves from the rest of God's creatures by gaining the knowledge of good and evil, they remain nevertheless creatures. They are the substance of creation. The human creature was formed from the dust of the ground, and likewise humans will return to dust when they die (3:19). So that the human couple does not further encroach upon divine prerogatives, especially immortality, God drives the humans out of the garden and bars its entrance and access to the tree of life (3:22–24). However, before God expels the humans from the garden, God first clothes them with garments (3:21). Because the garments are made from animal skins, they are symbolic of the differentiation between humans and animal. By clothing the humans, God endorses this differentiation. But more important, the garments are also a symbol of the differentiation between humans and God. God's message to the human couple is clear: This far, but no further! The man and the woman have become creators like God, but they are not nor will they ever be divine. Their garments serve as a symbol of their human status (Oden, 1987: 92–105).

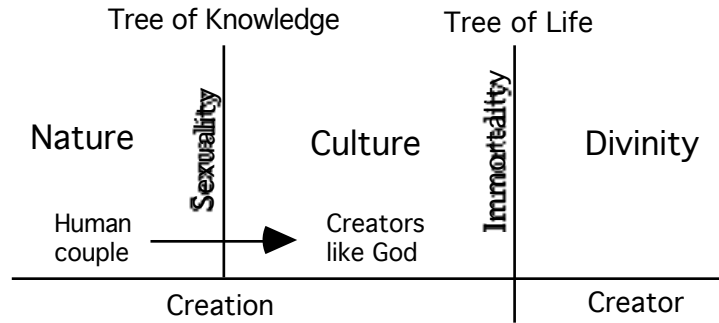


Figure 15. The Status of Humans

The Yahwist creation myth wrestles with the status of humans. According to the fundamental Classification domains of creator and creation, where do humans fit? Clearly, humans belong to the creation domain. Human existence is dependent upon another, and humans are mortal like the rest of creation. Yet humans are also like the creator. Humans replicate God's creative activity within the creation. Humans are thus also distinct from the rest of creation. The Yahwist's presentation of the status of humans is illustrated in figure 15. The two trees in the Yahwist's narrative serve to differentiate the three domains of the world. Nature and culture are the subdomains of creation. By eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, humans move from nature to culture. The tree of life serves to demarcate the domain of divinity. Although humans of culture can create like God, they are unable to become divine. The tree of life is barred from human access.

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If the human acquisition of the knowledge of good and evil in Genesis 3 cannot properly be labeled the "Fall," the same cannot be said for the human use of this knowledge that the Yahwist presents in the subsequent chapters of Genesis. The knowledge of good and evil enables humans to develop culture, and so humans build cities (4:17), create music (4:21), and invent technology (4:22). But humans also murder other humans (4:8, 23) and have sexual relations with divine beings (6:1–4). Cultural knowledge unleashes the evil inclination of humans so that their wickedness becomes abundant on the earth (6:5). Therefore, God regrets that the creation of humans, and decides to destroy all the living

creatures that God made (6:6–7). According to the Yahwist, God wipes out all living creatures with a flood produced by a torrential rainstorm lasting forty days. Only one family is spared, the family of Noah, because Noah finds favor in God's sight (6:8).

The Yahwist's flood myth provides the completion to his creation myth.⁷ The creation myth begins by noting that the earth is barren because of two factors: God has not caused rain to fall on the earth, and there is no human to till the ground. By eating the fruit of knowledge, the man is transformed from a caretaker of a pleasure garden into a cultivator of the earth. Yet the ground remains cursed without rain. After the flood, however, the cursing of the ground comes to an end. God institutes a regular seasonal cycle, characteristic of the eastern Mediterranean region, which includes the regular occurrence of rain (8:22). The ground is now receptive to human cultivation. At last the ground will readily yield its produce so that even humans can plant a garden (9:20). The advent of rain brings to completion the process of creation.

The Yahwist's Values Toward Nature

The Yahwist's story, of course, does not end with the flood, but this is a suitable stopping point for our investigation of the Israelites' values toward nature. Through the multivalent metaphors of his creation myth the Yahwist was wrestling with the ambiguity of human existence. In origin, in substance, and in death, humans are like the rest of creation. They are born from the earth, sharing the same substance as the ground, and will return to the earth when they die. The humans are fellow creatures with the animals and the birds. They are and always will be beings of nature.

But humans are also like God; they have the knowledge of good and evil. Humans are distinct from the rest of creation in that they have gained cultural knowledge. They have acquired the ability to create like Yahweh: They can bring forth new human life and cause the earth to produce plant life. Outside of the garden, they create other aspects of culture. Being like God, however, has its drawbacks! Although culture frees humans from some of the constraints of nature, culture lacks the tranquility and harmony of the garden. The harmony between humans and animals is disrupted. Their relationship now is characterized by hostility; one will prey upon the other. Moreover, the tasks of creating itself are inherently painful. The woman, whose cultural task subordinates her to the man, experiences the travail of childbirth, and the man must struggle with toil and sweat to provide a subsistence for his family. Although human life is difficult as a result of cultural knowledge, this is the inevitable lot of humans in the real world. Humans are thus also beings of culture.

In describing this ambiguous human condition, the Yahwist appears to vacillate between the harmony-with-nature and the mastery-over-nature solutions to the human-relationship-to-nature problem, though the latter solution remains subordinate to the former. Ontologically, humans are part of the created world, unable to eradicate their natural

⁷ Unlike the J and P creation myths that remain distinct, being placed side by side in the biblical text, their respective flood myths are difficult to discern because they have been mixed together like the shuffling of a deck of cards. A conventional scholarly division of the text by sources is as follows. The Yahwist flood myth: 6:5-8; 7:1-7, 10, 12, 16b-20, 22-23; 8:2b-3a, 6, 8-12, 13b, 20-22. The Priestly flood myth: 6:9-22; 7:8-9, 11, 13-16a, 21, 24; 8:1-2a, 3b-5, 7, 13a, 14-19; 9:1-17.

being. Humans are bound to the natural world and share the fate of the natural world. The human acquisition of cultural knowledge, however, qualifies the determinism of nature. Although humans are not able to free themselves from nature, they can act upon and transform the natural world to create culture. Nature becomes an outgroup, distinct from human culture. Culture is the sphere of human mastery-over-nature that disrupts the harmony between humans and the rest of the natural world. But this disturbance in the harmony of nature does not have ultimate significance. In the end, humans too will die like all other natural creatures.

The Priestly Creation Myth

Creation in Seven Days: Genesis 1:1–2:3

The Priestly creation myth is unlike the Yahwist creation myth in both form and content. Whereas the Yahwist's myth is set in the form of an elaborate tale and employs a wide variety of rich metaphors in order to accentuate the ambiguity of human existence in the world, the Priestly writer's myth is a highly structured, straightforward discourse on the order of creation. One scholar has even characterized this myth as Priestly doctrine – “ancient, sacred knowledge, preserved and handed on by many generations of priests, repeatedly pondered, taught, reformed and expanded most carefully and compactly by new reflections and experiences of faith” (von Rad, 1972a: 63) – though perhaps this is overstated. In any case, few readers would fail to recognize the striking differences between the Yahwist and the Priestly creation myths.

In contrast to the dry barren earth with which the Yahwist myth begins, the Priestly myth begins by describing a formless world dominated by water: “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters” (1:1–2).⁸ These verses give the setting of God's creative activity. They describe a situation closely akin to the opening scene of the *Enuma Elish*. According to this myth the primordial state of the cosmos consists only of the undifferentiated, mingling waters of Tiamat (salt water) and Apsu (sweet water) from which the gods are born. Creation in the *Enuma Elish* entails the establishment of order, classification, and differentiation: Apsu is bound; Tiamat is slain, split, and confined within set boundaries; and the gods are stationed at their appointed positions in the cosmos. Similarly, the Priestly writer begins his creation myth by describing the primordial state of the cosmos as a chaotic, undifferentiated world, symbolized by the waters which cover an empty and unproductive earth (Tsumura: 30–43). The “plot” of the remainder of the myth focuses on God's ordering and categorizing of this primordial material into a world suitable for human habitation.

⁸ Genesis 1:1 has traditionally been translated as, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” or in some similar fashion. The term “beginning” is thus understood to be an absolute beginning (Eichrodt, 1962). Many other creation myths in the ancient Near East, and the Yahwist creation myth in particular, suggest that “beginning” should be understood as a relative beginning. Moreover, the comparative evidence argues in favor of interpreting vv. 1-2 as temporally subordinate to God's specific acts of creation that follow. In other words, these verses describe the state of the pre-created world at the time God began to create (Speiser, 1982: 11-13).

Like the Yahwist creation myth, the Priestly creation myth does not support the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. In typical ancient Near Eastern fashion, the Priestly writer has God utilize existing elements in order to create the world. Creation in the ancient Near Eastern cultures entailed not the producing of something from nothing, but rather the ordering of a world or the birth of new elements from existing ones. Some critics might argue, however, that in the Priestly myth God does create by divine fiat, suggesting some notion of creation from nothing. But even this widely accepted characterization of the P creation myth must be qualified. The divine fiat is indeed a feature of this myth, but only in the case of light does God create by command alone. In all other cases the myth states that God “made”, “separated”, or “created” (with no specified method) something, or that the earth itself brings forth life. The divine fiat, then, does not indicate creation from nothing.

After describing the setting of creation, the Priestly writer immediately turns to God’s creation of the world. In a highly formulaic discourse, the Priestly writer structures God’s creative acts into a seven day scheme – six days of creation and a day of rest. Moreover, the description of each of the six days of creation follows a recurring pattern. The text for each day begins with the declarative formula, “And God said,” followed by a command specifying what will be created. The execution of the command is signaled by the formula, “And it was so.” Then the actual creation in fulfillment of the command is described. In most cases, God is the actor in creation, but on the third day the earth itself brings forth plants and trees. Upon completion of the divine command, God’s approval of the creation is sealed with the statement, “And God saw that it was good.” Finally, the text for each day ends with the temporal formula, “And there was evening and there was morning, the [first-sixth] day” (Anderson, 1977: 151–52; Westermann, 1984: 84–85).

Although much of the content of the Priestly creation myth is undoubtedly dependent upon earlier creation traditions (scholars have noted similarities with Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and earlier Israelite myths), the formal structure of the myth reflects the Priestly writer’s own contribution. In particular, the Priestly writer conformed the creation traditions he inherited into a seven day scheme for the purpose of ordering both space and time (Coote and Ord, 1991: 51). With regard to space, the Priestly writer divided the six days of creation into two parts, each consisting of four acts of creation with two acts on the third and the sixth days respectively (Anderson, 1977: 154–55). There is a slight anomaly in the Priestly writer’s symmetrical scheme because the waters are never created. They are primordial. On the second day, God creates the sky by separating the waters above (which produce rain, snow, and hail) from the waters below (1:6–8). Then on the third day God separates the land from the waters (1:9–10). As a result, the creation of the seas is the by-product of God’s second and third act of creation. The structure of creation is illustrated in figure 16.

Although the order of creation initially appears to be arbitrary, the Priestly writer has actually classified the world according to a meaningful spatial pattern. The key to understanding this classification is the fourth day. On that day God creates the sun, the moon, and the stars (1:14–19).⁹ But light was created on the first day! How can light exist without the sources of

Environments		Occupants	
Day 1	Light	Day 4	Heavenly Luminaries
Day 2	Sky (Rain/Seas)	Day 5	Sea Monsters, Fish, Birds
Day 3	Land Vegetation	Day 6	Animals Humans

Figure 16. The Six Days of Creation

light? Was the Priestly writer simply ignorant of the causal connection between heavenly luminaries and light, or did he have a specific purpose for this arrangement? Light appears to have been created first, according to the Priestly writer, in order to offset the primordial darkness. Light was created to alternate with darkness, forming day and night (1:3–5). Light and darkness are not a substance but rather an environment or a habitat in which living beings exist. The sun, moon, and stars, are thus presented as the “beings” of this environment. The sun is the “being” that inhabits and moves about in the realm of light, and the moon and the stars occupy the realm of darkness. Similarly, in each of the first three days God creates an environment, whereas in the second three days God creates the corresponding inhabitants of each environment: Birds are created for the sky, sea monsters and fish for the waters, and animals and humans for the land and vegetation. The Priestly creation myth, therefore, categorizes space into four distinct environments and assigns the appropriate occupants to each domain.

The Priestly creation myth also orders time. By structuring the creation according to a seven day scheme, the Priestly writer ascribes sacred significance to the seven day weekly cycle. The week is sacred time (Eliade: 1959: 68–113) and a symbolic repetition of God’s creation of the world.¹⁰ At the climax of this sacred time is the Sabbath itself. Although the observance of the Sabbath in ancient Israel pre-dates the Priestly writer (the origin of the Sabbath is unknown), the Sabbath in the biblical tradition has been shaped overwhelmingly by the work of the Priestly writer (Coote and Ord, 1992: 86).

Two aspects of the Sabbath are relevant to our discussion here. First, according to the Priestly writer, the Sabbath is foremost a repetition of the rest of God. Upon completion of the tasks of creation, God rested on the seventh day (2:1–3). In the ancient Near Eastern

⁹ The text actually states that God created the “to rule the day and the to rule the night” (Gen 1:16). Most commentators agree that the Priestly writer is precluding the implication that God created other gods since the Hebrew words for sun and moon are the names of known deities.

¹⁰ Levenson argues persuasively that the Priestly emphasis on seven days stems from the seven day New Year festivals during which the creation of the world was celebrated (1988: 66-77). Compare the different conclusion by Coote and Ord (1992: 79-84).

creation myths the rest of the creator-god is a divine prerogative. The creator-god demonstrates his divine rule by resting in his temple-palace (Batto, 1987b; Wallace, 1988: 237–41). The Priestly writer thus also associates creation and Sabbath with the building of the Tabernacle, God’s wilderness “temple” (Blenkinsopp: 280–81; Wallace, 1988: 244–50). By connecting creation with the Sabbath, the Priestly writer has provided a means by which the people of Judah, exiled in a foreign land without king or temple, can proclaim the sovereignty of God.

The Priestly writer also connects the Sabbath with the Sinai covenant. In fact, the Sabbath is described as the symbol of the covenant (Exod 31:12–17). Human observance of the Sabbath is related to one’s faithfulness to the stipulations of the covenant as God’s divine rest on the seventh day is related to his acts of creation on the previous six days. This correlation between Sabbath and covenant suggests that humans symbolically participate in the creation of the world by following the stipulations of the covenant. Human actions make a difference in this world! When humans follow the covenant, the order of creation is maintained. The established boundaries remain fixed. If humans neglect or reject the covenant, however, the creation itself suffers. The order of creation disintegrates, and the world reverts to its original chaotic state. By connecting creation, Sabbath, and covenant, the Priestly writer thus ascribes cosmogonic significance to human activities (Levenson, 1988: 127).

Humans play the focal role in the Priestly creation myth. The six days of creation are oriented toward the creation of humans, the crowning species of creation, and about their creation the Priestly writer makes the most extensive and detailed statements.¹¹ With regard to the creation of humans, the Priestly writer draws upon two distinct and unrelated observations about the nature of humankind. The first observation accentuates how humans are distinct from the rest of the creation. They are “like God” in their status and function within the created order. The second observation underscores how humans are similar to the rest of the creation. The human species is differentiated according to sex, and thus has a role in reproduction and sustaining created life (Bird, 1987: 32–33). Although originally independent, these two observations have been combined by the Priestly writer into a single discourse on the creation of humans:

²⁶Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” ²⁷So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and

¹¹ Bergant has argued that the structure of the Priestly creation account suggests that the verses reporting the creation of humans are a literary insertion. With regard to the fish and the birds, God “said . . . made . . . and blessed . . .,” but concerning the animals, God only “said . . . and made . . .” The creation of humans was then inserted with the original blessing of animals going to the humans along with the commission of dominion (9). This fragmentation of the text, however, is unnecessary. The blessing of the animals is indeed transferred to humans, but this is because humans are classified with the other earth creatures. The creation of humans is presented as “an amplification and specification of the creation of the land animals,” and thus the blessing of the animals has given way to the blessing of humankind (Bird, 1981: 145).

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

(Genesis 1:26–28)

It is important for the reader of this passage to recognize that two distinct observations on the nature of humankind have been juxtaposed in this discourse. Otherwise, the reader might be tempted to interpret the “image of God” in light of the sexual differentiation of humans (Trible, 1978: 15–21), or the procreation of humans as an expression of their subduing the earth. But these interpretations are not adequate. First, this type of interpretation fails to account for the fact that the animals undoubtedly are also differentiated sexually (even though the text itself is silent) and the birds and the fish are also commanded to be fruitful and multiply, but they are not created in the image of God (compare Wolff, 1974a: 95). As the image of God, humans are distinct from all other creatures. The “image of God” must refer to some aspect of humans in which they are distinct. Second, this type of interpretation fails to explain why the Priestly writer describes only humans as male and female. The Priestly creation myth is concerned not only with the order of creation but also “with the means by which the orders of life will fill the newly created world and perpetuate themselves in it” (Bird, 1987: 34). Therefore, the Priestly writer refers to “plants yielding seed” and fruit trees that “bear fruit with the seed in it” (1:11), and the birds and the fish are given the command, “Be fruitful and multiply” (1:22). Humans are also given the command to be fruitful and multiply, but in their case this command is problematic. The sexuality of the birds, the fish, and the animals is assumed by the Priestly writer, but such an assumption cannot be made for humans because they are in the image of God. For the Priestly writer God had no form of sexuality, no sexual differentiation. The Priestly writer thus states explicitly that humans were created male and female. The differentiation of humans into male and female distinguishes humans from God; “male and female” describes how humans are *not* in the image of God (Bird, 1987: 34–35).

The specific ways in which humans are in the “image of God” are difficult to assess because the Priestly writer does not explicitly give content to this expression. The basic thrust of the expression is that humans are *like* God. It is possible that the Priestly writer intends to suggest that humans are like God in appearance or form (J. M. Miller). In Genesis 5:3, for example, the Priestly writer states that Adam beget Seth according to his image. It is also possible that the Priestly writer is deliberately ambiguous in his designation of humans as the image of God. In other words, the Priestly writer simply wanted to state that humans are like God without specifying in what ways (Barr, 1968/9; 1972: 19–20). The context of Genesis 1:26–28, however, suggests that the “image of God” is closely connected to human dominion and rule over the earth (von Rad, 1972a: 60; Bird, 1981: 137–44). But even so, the exact connection between humans being in the image of God and having dominion over the earth is not specified. Humans might be *functionally* like God, ruling on the earth as God would rule (Tigay), or humans might have dominion *because* they are like God in some unstated way (Barr, 1972: 20). Perhaps we can be no more specific. The result appears to be

the same in either case: Humans are distinct from all other creatures in that they are like God and have dominion over the earth.

Ultimately, the “image of God” is comparable to the knowledge of good and evil. It is the attribute of humans by which they are distinguished from the rest of creation. The Yahwist emphasized the significance of human culture: Humans have the “knowledge” to create their own environment and to produce life – human and agricultural – like God. Similarly, by connecting the “image of God” with dominion, the Priestly writer emphasized the human ability to exercise its will over creation. Humans are not simply objects of creation, subjected to the fixed orders of creation. Humans have some measure of control over creation like God. The terms that the Priestly writer uses to describe this control are *rada*, “to rule,” and *kabash*, “to subdue.” These terms derive from the royal and military sphere. They are often used in reference to a king who is able to conquer and control enemy territory. Indeed, Psalm 8 praises God for having created humans like kings:

⁵Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor.
⁶You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under their feet,
⁷all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
⁸the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the seas.

(Psalm 8:5–8)

Although *rada* and *kabash* may carry violent connotations (as one would expect in reference to a conquering king), such connotations are lacking in the Priestly writer’s use of these terms. Humans may rule the animals, but they do not eat them (though compare Dequeker, 1977), nor are animals terrified of humans. Humans are commanded to subdue the earth, but this is probably analogous to the Yahwist’s emphasis on tilling the ground (Barr, 1972: 21–22).

Although humans are given dominion over the earth, their rule is not absolute. The Priestly writer’s discourse on the creation of humans cannot be divorced from the rest of his creation myth, the focal theme of which is the establishment of order. Human dominion must conform to the order of creation. This is implied from the context of Genesis 1, but it is explicitly stated in later Priestly texts. For example, the Priestly writer condones sexual relations only between a man and a woman. According to the order of creation, humans were created male and female. Thus, homosexual relations or sexual relations between humans and animals are strictly forbidden (Lev 18:22–23; 20:13, 15). Similarly, once animals are declared suitable for food, only certain animals may be eaten (Lev 11). Animals that appear to violate the order of creation (e.g., the catfish which swims in the water but is covered with a skin rather than scales that are appropriate to fish) are considered unclean and are thus unacceptable for food (Douglas: 41–57; Carroll; Eilberg-Schwartz: 218–21). For the Priestly writer, human rule of the earth is subject to the stipulations of the covenant, for these stipulations outline the order of creation.

Flood and New Creation: Genesis 6–9, parts

The relationship between human dominion and the order of creation can be stated more emphatically: Human rule of the earth serves either to actively maintain the order of creation, or to cause the disintegration of creation. Human dominion is not neutral! It affects the order of creation. Moreover, the order of creation is given a ritual dimension. When humans violate the order of creation, they not only bring disorder into the world, they ritually defile themselves and often that with which they come into contact. Ritual pollution is not ultimately dangerous to the order of creation. Coming into contact with a corpse, for example, defiles a person, but otherwise the person experiences no onerous consequences. Ritual impurity normally lasts a set period of time or can be cleansed through the appropriate rituals. This ritual impurity, however, is a symbol for those violations of the created order that have dire consequences. Some violations of the created order – murder, sexual abominations, idolatry – defile a person permanently. Progressive violations even pollute the earth itself. Such pollution cannot be *ritually* cleansed; the creation itself must be purged. Such pollution undermines the order of creation (Frymer-Kensky, 1983). Only when humans rule according to the created order is the world suitable for human habitation.

Humans in the biblical tradition rarely exercise their dominion properly, within the constraints of the created order. Too often they ignore the orders of creation, or disregard the stipulations of the covenant, and thus bring the collapse of creation upon themselves. This characteristic of human dominion serves as the premise for the Priestly writer's flood myth. Like the Yahwist flood myth, this flood myth brings to completion the Priestly creation myth. The myth begins by emphasizing the wretched state to which human dominion has fallen: "Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence" because "all flesh had corrupted its ways on the earth" (6:11–12). According to the Priestly writer, human violence¹² results in the corruption, or rather, the pollution of the earth (Frymer-Kensky, 1977: 153; 1983: 409). The text of P itself presents no specific acts of violence. In its canonical context the text of P presupposes the Yahwist's references to the murders by Cain and Lamech, but the evidence from the chronological references in the flood myth suggests that the Priestly flood myth was written independently of J so that it is uncertain to what "violence" might have originally referred (Barré: 17; contrary Anderson 1978). Whatever the nature of this violence, the Priestly writer understands it to be an abuse of human dominion. Rather than maintain the order of creation, humans brought disorder into the world, thereby polluting and destabilizing the creation.

The creation can only tolerate so much disorder. Eventually, the creation will disintegrate to the chaos that originally characterized the world. The Priestly writer, like the Yahwist, thus presents the flood as the consequence of human actions. But in contrast to the Yahwist who imagined the flood as simply the result of much rain, the Priestly writer attributes the flood to the collapse of the principal boundaries of creation: "all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened" (7:11). The

¹² The reference to "all flesh" could refer to all creatures--birds, fish, animals, and humans alike. Certainly, all creatures are corrupted by the violence and inevitably experience its effects. But in the context of the creation and the flood, "all flesh" refers specifically to the human species. Only humans are the source of violence (Anderson, 1984a: 161-65).

boundaries that separate the waters from the sky and the land break open so that the world returns to its primordial, undifferentiated, watery state.

The flood myth, however, does not end with the world in chaos. On New Year's day – almost one year after the waters broke loose (Barré) – the earth is dry (8:13). The flood is not simply the disintegration of creation but also the means by which the creation is purged. The flood serves to cleanse the creation from the pollution caused by human violence. Noah and his family alone are spared because he is righteous and blameless (6:9). The result of the flood is a new creation. This is the significance of the flood ending on New Year's day, for on this day God's creation of the world and victory over chaos is celebrated (Eliade, 1959: 77–80).¹³ The recreation of the world, necessitated by its pollution, entails first the destruction of the creation. Only through the catastrophic collapse of creation is a new creation possible.

After the flood, Noah and his family are given the mandate: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (9:1). Like the first humans, Noah and his family must act to sustain the creation. Unlike the first humans, however, no mandate is given for Noah to exercise dominion on the earth. Human dominion is assumed, and the Priestly writer instead gives two laws for regulating human dominion. First, humans may exercise their dominion by eating other living creatures, but the blood of the creatures must be drained (9:2–3). Blood is the symbol of life. By draining the blood of creatures, humans demonstrate that life belongs to God's dominion rather than their own. They are able to eat other creatures only by virtue of God's grant. Second, human blood may not be shed. Whoever, or whatever, kills a human, that creature in turn will be killed by humans, “for in his own image God made humankind” (9:6). Human life belongs to God and is not subject to human dominion. The interpretation of the explanatory clause in this injunction is ambiguous. The clause could ascribe special sanctity to human life: Human life is more precious than all other life because humans are in the image of God (Wenham: 193–94). Such an interpretation, however, does not adequately account for the context of the flood and the central focus of human dominion. Because humans are made in the image of God, they are given dominion over the earth. But humans abused their dominion and polluted the earth, bringing about the catastrophic flood. So that the creation will not again be destroyed by human pollution, God regulates human dominion: Humans may kill animals for food if they drain the blood, but they may not kill other humans. Moreover, God imposes the threat of death to ensure human compliance with these regulations. But because humans are made in God's image, *humans* rather than God will impose the death penalty (Tigay: 174). Human dominion will be self-regulating so that God need not destroy the creation again with flood.

The Priestly Writer's Values Toward Nature

The Priestly creation myth has traditionally been interpreted from the perspective of the mastery-over-nature solution to the human-relationship-to-nature problem, and not without some merit. Humans are distinguished from the rest of creation; humans alone are made in

¹³ On the fourth day of the Babylonian New Year's festival (the Akitu festival), the priests recited the and celebrated Marduk's creation of the world.

the image of God. Humans are given dominion to rule the earth, and so can exercise their wills over creation. Clearly, the Priestly creation account is at odds with the subjugation-to-nature solution. Yet the mastery-over-nature solution does not accurately correspond to the Priestly account either, for it does not account for the human situation within the context of creation. Human dominion is limited by the order of creation. Humans are part of the creation and so must conform to the created order. Specifically, dominion is the means by which humans maintain this order. When human dominion is exercised according to the order of creation, it further maintains that order. Otherwise, human dominion corrupts the creation, leading to its eventual collapse. The mastery-over-nature solution to the human-relationship-to-nature problem, then, is subordinate to the harmony-with-nature solution for the Priestly writer. Only when humans act in accord with the order of creation is their activity productive rather than destructive.

The Priestly writer and the Yahwist presume similar basic value orientations toward nature. Ultimately, humans are part of creation, and therefore subject to the constraints or boundaries of creation. Humans cannot emancipate themselves from creation, but neither are humans slaves to creation. In relation to their value orientations, human dominion and the knowledge of good and evil (cultural knowledge) serve the same purpose: They describe metaphorically the autonomy that humans have *within* the order of creation. Humans can transform creation! For the Yahwist, such activity is possible because humans have become creators like God by acquiring cultural knowledge. For the Priestly writer, humans are created in the image of God and given the task of ruling the earth. And as long as humans rule according to the order of creation, they contribute to the process of creation. Both the Priestly writer and the Yahwist root their values toward nature in the ambiguity of the human situation: Humans are part of the creation yet also exceptional in the creation.