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Creation, Fall and Political Theology

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the two creation stories of *Genesis*, arguing that the theology inherent to them does not support the standard assumption of divine and political sovereignty being analogous concepts. God has endowed Man with unique faculties necessary to act as God's vicar within creation, but these faculties have become essentially distorted by the Fall. Although, understandably, there is precious little in the Bible about how Man's governing would have been like, there are some important insights the text offers; and the analysis of the Fall and its aftermath gives us further clues to that. Essentially, Man's faculties of making distinctions, realizing goodness, being able to recognize his divine mission, and acknowledge the other as a partner, have become fundamentally distorted, and are being inevitably abused. Outside the Eden, we have no other choice but to rely on these faculties in politics, in the City. The Bible is a constant reminder, however, that these faculties are inherently corruptive. Thus, contra Carl Schmitt's presumption, theological concepts, inasmuch as they are meant to capture truth (though deficiently), cannot be secularized, only abused. Biblical political theology is essentially critical of positive political theory.

Political Theory and *Genesis*

Recently, Yoram Hazony has argued that “[t]he exclusion of the Bible from the history of political philosophy is a mistake of the first order.”¹ The Hebrew Bible [henceforth: Bible] was extensively used in early modern age political thinking, thus, in this sense, the urge to return to the text is not new. However, the Bible is an immense corpus that can hardly be inserted into a political philosophy curriculum as such. But many of its books display remarkable theological coherence, which can be exploited in the modern context of political theology profitably.

Genesis in general has been scrutinized by some political theorists.² As it is a long and eventful book, written in different ages and by authors, one must be careful to avoid attributing to it a coherent political message. Nonetheless, the text has been fixed for many centuries, and its conceptual and imaginary apparatus remains unchanged. Thus, *it* (and not the authors) can be subjected to various interpretations.

Two fundamental questions arise. The first is: when does *Genesis* introduce politics (the political condition of mankind)? The second is: does it do approvingly

or disapprovingly? The two questions are, of course, interrelated.

H. Fradkin asserted that the “first part [of *Genesis*] contains only a single reference to political life – the indication that Cain was its founder by building the first city. It contains no mention of divine political activity.”³ But this founding act was *Cain's* act, that is, an act of a murderer. This is hardly a favorable introduction of political life.

Especially under the influence of Aristotle, and more recently, of Hannah Arendt, political theorists have often emphasized the intrinsically associative nature of politics. Politics is constituted by living together in the polis and acting in concert. Now if *Genesis* makes the first reference to “the city” in the story of Cain, who build it after murdering his brother; and then we read the story of Babel, and then the story of Sodoma and Gomorrah, the twin cities punished for the perversity of the mores of their inhabitants, then it is hard to avoid the impression that *Genesis* basically rejects any illusions of politics being an axiomatically positive feature of post-Edenic life of mankind. Politics may be a necessity, and in that sense willed or at least sanctioned by God, but it has no meaning within Eden.

Let us, however, note that Cain's crime does not constitute a graver offense in God's eye than Adam's revolt. Most probably, Cain's act strikes us as more serious than Adam's sin, as murder is, by definition, the rejection of politics understood as an associative form of life. But as Fradkin rightly observes, Cain only followed his father's footsteps in his revolt against God. Hence, he continues, the deterioration of man's original condition began in the Eden. It follows then that Adam was already a "political man" after all. Fradkin elaborates this by pointing out that Adam was already in the business of "sewing fig leaves," thereby distorting God's creation by his activities, and undertaking "to consider and judge himself in terms of inferiority and superiority,"⁴ which also refers to (injured) pride and shame. Pride, superiority, inferiority, "disfiguring the creation," and shame (as an essentially social emotion), are sufficiently political to refute Fradkin's own position for an apolitical reading of the creation stories. It is a questionable assumption that there were no divine and human political activities prior to Cain's story.

It may then follow that politics may have begun before the founding of the first city, but it has something inherently evil about it, since its origin lies within the act of Man's⁵ revolt against God. In Leo Strauss' characteristically ambiguous formulation: "man was created in the image of God, in a way like God. Was he not, therefore, congenitally tempted to transgress any prohibitions, any limitations? Was this likeness to God not a constant temptation to be literally like Him?"⁶

What I wish to argue for is that *Genesis*, and the creation stories in particular, do have a political conception (hence politics "begins" much earlier than Cain's founding act) which is essentially positive, or perhaps constructive, but it also warns that our political condition became distorted, in much the same sense as our "reason" became deficient according to the doctrine of the original sin.

As far as the "beginning of politics" is concerned, notwithstanding the Aristotelian-Arendtian associative and communicative conception of politics which would identify the starting moment with Cain's founding of the first city on earth, readers of the creation may easily find concepts and ideas pertinent and essential to any political theory. Besides the idea of sovereignty, evident in the very act of creation, command and rule, prohibition and its violations, prefigure in the story, not to speak about concepts of good and evil, life and death. Further, immediately after the Fall, a highly political game begins, as it were, between God and Man, with ambiguities, blaming,

equivocating, pretending, maneuvering; and the story culminates in a trial, with God presiding over it. Thus, the creation stories are especially rich in political concepts, which are extensively used to explain the differences and similarities between God and Man.

The normative outlook and content of politics, as explained in the creation stories, is more difficult to determine. In what follows, I will analyze the embryonic political theology can be derived from God's creation of the world and of Man, as well as from Man's original mission and post-Fall condition. It will be here and there more speculative than strictly textual, but what matters is the accumulative evidence. In terms of method, then, I am going to follow Strauss' analytical-speculative approach, though, as I hope, less equivocally.

The political theology inherent to the creation stories is especially relevant in view of the familiar, controversial but forceful assumption put forward by Carl Schmitt, namely, that our political concepts are secularized theological ones; although other genealogists, like Giorgio Agamben, have argued that the relation may work in the opposite direction as well: theological concepts may have originated in political realities and experiences. I do not wish to engage in this debate. What is certain is that, according to *Genesis*, God is both essentially similar to and different from Man. Man's ambiguous ontological relation to God is a central thesis of the creation stories, and as I argued, the language and the conceptual toolkit of the story is remarkably *political*. Thus, the theological stakes and the political language together make *Genesis* a natural and highly important source for political theorizing.

In the subsequent sections I shall analyze these concepts one by one. These investigations accumulate ample evidence for the thesis that Man was given the vocation or office of ruling the Creation by sharing God's sovereignty; however, the Fall tells us how our 'political faculties' got distorted, conducing to a perverted language of and thinking about our political condition. Thus, the analogies between the divine and the political sovereign are real but drawing them 'politically' remains probably forbidden to us.

Sovereign Creation and Its Distortion

Creation was a very complex procedure. The text is very dense. It refers to God's operations in terms (and verbs) as "created," [Hebrew *bara*] "made," [*asah*] "separated," [*badal*] etc. These terms are separable by risking loss of perspective, and they are partly overlapping; however, only an analytical approach can reveal the analogies between God's and Man's

(political) sovereignty. Etymological and philological subtleties put aside, *Genesis* clearly teaches that creation was a series of acts that are essentially different from human actions (it is relevant, after all, that the term *bara* is used exclusively in reference to God). In lack of a better expression, creation is often explained in terms of not-being and being, in terms of the nothing vs the world, of void vs heaven and earth. Such explanations certainly illuminate one aspect of creation, but the text employs the other two verbs to describe further aspects of it. Those terms are themselves complex, giving us some further hints as “how” creation is being done: God “makes” things and “separates” them. These acts are, translated into more rigorous philosophical terms, the expressions of how the ontological structure of the world looks like, namely, essences (properties) and relations. Essences are made or formed, while relations are constituted by divisions, without which essences could not subsist. By virtue of essences and relations, the world becomes both unified and plural, one and many, as Plato would put it. The Bible seems to offer a coherent ontological perspective on the created world.

God’s creation is, thus, not only a world created *ex nihilo*, beyond comprehension, but also a world that is intellectually comprehensible. Many of its essences and their relations may still be unknown to us, but God seems to have not hidden anything in this world for good. Other species may have a different understanding of the world, but human understanding can make the world fully comprehensible to itself. Creating the world was not a series of acts of producing mysteries and riddles. The sovereign intellect, as it reveals itself to us within creation, is *transparent*.⁷

Man’s creation is of particular importance, told twice, with different emphases.⁸ The first story is about God’s majestic act of creating Man in His own image as male and female, as well as blessing and entrusting them with the power of dominion over the world. This account fits well within the trajectory of the whole creation. God’s acts are consistent throughout: *making* Man and *separating* the genders, but also Himself from His image. The second story communicates further details about the making of Man. It was, we are told here, an act of *formation*. Man’s body is formed out of clay, and God blows the breath of life into his nostrils. Man is then called to name the various animals of creation, which is analogous to God’s speaking. God’s words are themselves a kind of (self-) separation, and Man’s naming acts are also indicative of a kind of alienation from creation. For as we give names to creatures, and by extension, to

all phenomena of the world, including the laws of nature, thereby we separate ourselves from them, placing ourselves outside of creation.

There are, however, two new and extraordinary acts here, those of unification. First the body and the spirit, done by God; and then – after the separation of the genders – man and woman are united by Man. Significantly, this occurs after Adam “does not” find a suitable partner for himself among the creatures. Perhaps this was the first temptation, successfully rejected by Adam. It is significant that his unifying act is not sexual intercourse but a *recognition* that Eve is his own flesh. This purely intellectual act of unification signifies God’s and Man’s cooperation in making creation complete.

While creation proper is God’s exclusive working, Man’s participation in it has long been a theme in various philosophies and cultural theories, culminating perhaps in Hegel’s philosophy of world history. Although our concepts of Man’s creative faculties are still under the Romantic influence, in which great artists and scientists possess almost supernatural creative powers, a certain democratization of arts and sciences has taken place (in a sense, this is return to the pre-Romantic era). Many people think, and are probably right in thinking so, that creative powers are more evenly distributed. Further, intellectual capacities of capturing the essence of things and explaining their relations by analysis (distinctions and separations) as well as of creating new things by unifying them are simply part and parcel of plain human thinking. Within social and political life, we consider it natural that most people can be masters of their decisions and lives. It seems, then, that *Genesis* makes a tentative case for a concept of Man who takes part in creation by using his faculties, including what may be called a root political capacity of performing acts of social and political *division and unification*. This could be a pre-Fall notion of political sovereignty: a transparent, intellectually comprehensible, and efficient agency of mankind.

This faculty of Man got, however, seriously distorted. In the course of events told by *Genesis*, we find next Eve’s decision to eat from the tree of the knowledge of the good and evil. This is her act of unification, mirroring Adam’s unification of man and woman. But he now succumbs to the second temptation and follows her. Now they hope to unite themselves with God by eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge and become full masters of the art of separating things⁹ because they must know God’s reason to *separate* the tree of knowledge from the rest of the trees. But what they achieve is a unification with

nature, rather than with God; and they will soon learn that unification with nature is, in effect, submission to it by making their instincts rule over themselves.

They learn nothing new about nature. The tree is not essentially different from any other tree.¹⁰ But they do become aware of a strange and new separation between “before” and “after.” And they are now able to distinguish between good and evil. For the time being, evil consists in hardly more but in their sensing the loss of their power to rule over creation. Thus, good and evil are not “moral substances” created by God. Rather, these are their own “creatures” that signify their powerlessness over nature, including their own nature. Morality and the distinction between good and evil, intrinsic to it, is a human invention, cursed with our incapacity of “unifying” them, that is, overcoming the distinction and restoring the unified goodness of the world. In this way, morality is a testimony to our powerlessness.

However, the new separation between before and after, between good and evil, animates their creative powers. They have not lost them, but these powers are already corrupted, as it is revealed in four relations. Their first creative action is sewing fig leaves to cover their genitalia: an act that changes their outlook, making Man not just distinct but in a special way visibly separate from the rest of the creation. But the coverage of Man’s exposedness is a symptom of Man’s inability to control himself, for being confronted with nudity we are “compelled” to think of our instincts even if we try to “aestheticize” our visual experience. Hence shame “is the painful response to the self-consciously recognized gap between our idealized self-image and the truth about ourselves. (...) shame is manifest only before the other.”¹¹

Secondly, the separation of man and woman becomes permanent. Sexual intercourse is a unification of bodies but not of persons, and the text makes it clear that this act occurs only after the Fall. The sexual act has remained intertwined with emotions of conquest, possession, violence and resistance. But it is remarkable how much creativity Man has shown in idealizing and exalting love, in this respect, to tame the instinct. Following Kant’s commentary, Leon Kass also stresses the importance of the adornment aspect of the fig leaves, and we may also add, passingly, the Freudian concept of sublimation, that is, sexual instincts becoming into social and intellectual assets.

Thirdly, before their expulsion from Eden, Man experiences separation from God. They hide in the garden, using it as a cover against God, initiating mankind into the art of escaping God. Strauss thought that the Bible is anti-philosophical; even if this is an

exaggeration, the point finds here a qualified vindication: there has been so much creative philosophical work invested in circumventing the problems of metaphysics and avoiding the confrontation with God’s existence.

Fourthly, among our various creative but corrupted capacities, morality has prominence. Morality does not add up to the goodness of creation. It is by and within morality that our fallen nature has petrified, and turned into Law, a constant reminder of our own powerlessness, of our inability to overcome the very distinction between good and bad. At the same time, morality stands before us as an eternal temptation to abolish it. To protect morality from our destructive selves, we have invented the polis.

The key figure is, indeed, Cain. He is said to cultivate land, separating it from the sovereign area of nature, but no longer “ruling it”: “man now knows that he is hardly a ruler; on the contrary, his choice for independence makes him like a slave who must work and serve the earth.”¹² We revolt against nature and subdue it by preparing tools. But our tools are also weapons. Cain used perhaps his plow to kill his brother. He fulfills the curse that Man shall have to know life and death alike, and return to dust, declaring the triumph of nature (Creation without God) over Man.

However, as Adam was spared, Cain is not wiped off from the face of earth, either. He does not become a wretched wanderer, as he fears. On the contrary, he settles and “creates” the first city. Creative political imagination is launched by a murderer. Michael Walzer also remarks that the Bible is through and through an antipolitical text.¹³ But, we can and should add now, it is such in a principled way. Political life emerges as intended by God to make life on earth tolerable. Thus, whereas Cain’s prominent role in founding politics is certainly the harshest possible indication of the origins of politics within the Fall, and he names the city after his son, Enoch, an indication of the city’s belonging to earth, rather than to heaven; Cain’s descendants seem to have lived peacefully and for long, though increasingly shortened, periods of time.

By way of admittedly straining our imagination a bit, the link between Adam’s artwork and Cain’s city becomes apparent. Both are acts of *hiding*, in Adam’s case, the intimacy of the individual, in Cain’s case, the intimacy of the social or the political; in Adam’s case, the human body, in Cain’s case, the political body. Fig leaves and city walls are variations of the same theme, namely, hiding what “must be” hidden, namely, the embarrassing truth that we are not

masters of even ourselves, and that we desire to subdue other, which is a truth putting ourselves to risk, as Hobbes clearly saw. Political sovereignty *needs* borders (walls) principally as a way of *hiding* the truth of its collective vulnerability, greed and envy (which Hobbes did not, however, see).

To sum up: there is no reason to suppose that God did not want man to become a master in the art of separation and unification. On the contrary: separating and uniting man and woman is shown to have been the crowning act of creation. But it seems that Eve's decision to prevent God's possible plans to be carried out initiated a more painful path, with making distinctions murky and unifications ambiguous and often violent. Our distorted capacity to separate and unify things has further consequences for political theory. Dystopian thinking begins in the garden, as Adam and Eve look around there to find shelter from God rather than enjoy and cultivate it, and the Eden is already the utopian past, a memory, to which they – and us – continue to cling. Since then, our political thinking has been torn between two possibilities. First, the hope that there is a way back to the Garden, which would result in a self-elimination of the city (removal of both walls – politics – and clothes – morality), a return to blissful anarchism. Here the unification of individual and the collective sovereign occurs by the former absorbing the latter. Secondly, to make a promise of re-creating the Garden within the city, as the story of Babel suggests, the message being there that mankind can remain there *unified*, with the collective sovereign absorbing the individual one. But neither the political will to create anarchy by eliminating politics and morality, nor the political will to create unified mankind (in modern age, at least nations or races) has produced much more than increased suffering and abuse of power.

The Sovereign Call

Besides making and separating/dividing, creation is “being done” by existential imperatives that God addresses to Himself. “Let there be” – God “says” – and then he “calls” what He created, for instance, “day” and “night.” Of course, it would be silly to ask who could have overheard God talk to Himself, but it is a meaningful idea that human beings do talk to themselves, dividing, as it were, their own selves into two, and communicating with (or within) themselves. Thinking, especially conscious and deliberate thinking (when we are aware of the fact, or make ourselves aware of it, *that* we are thinking) is a complicated phenomenon. Let us take it to be a common

experience that, in its paradigm form, thinking is done by using language loudly or silently. It seems to follow that when we begin to form words, perhaps without uttering or writing them down, we are already in the midst of some separation. Our thoughts are expressed, formed, perhaps captured by words which are then “out there.” Thus, creation might be interpreted as the separation of God from His own words. The very word of creation – “fiat”/“(let there) “be” – asserts that whatever is created, belongs to God intrinsically. It is constantly echoed by and within the universe. Unlike human words that are incessantly interpreted by others, and in this sense can never be entirely private, God's words remain entirely His. Yet the word of creation also entails a certain difference (separation), a perceptibility unlike God's own essence. Sovereignty's principal form is words, rather than images; and God's words are existential fiats.

Man is incapable of creating by existential imperatives, but *Genesis* reports that man gave name to the animals, and later “quotes” Adam to “call” his partner “woman.” Consistent with portraying Man having creative and intellectual faculties, man's communicative faculty of “naming” is certainly suggested to be divine, and the first words uttered by Man, the *words of recognition*, are similarly majestic.

Naming is akin to calling something into existence, and throughout the Bible, calling someone by name has a sacral aspect. God does not have a proper name, of course, but He has a voice, which is echoed by the whole creation. Man's voice by which he called animals and birds by their “names” remained, however, without an echo. On this metaphysical level loneliness is not a social hiatus or an unsatisfied psychological need. Rather, it is an indication that Man is not yet elevated to the communicative fullness of God. As was pointed out, the formation of the woman is another action of separation, but unlike the former acts of separation recognized by God as good, here it is Adam who recognizes Eve as his own flesh. Man has the power to unify by recognition, and that by words: the “other” is declared to be “like me.” Man's true nature is revealed only by the echo of another person. This is an extraordinary and exquisite power, making man a cooperative partner of God in accomplishing creation.¹⁴

Man is now in Eden, which is not a political community (the city),¹⁵ but the existence of another human being creates the fundamental context of communication. As it will turn out soon, communication gets distorted, and this immediately leads to subjection and subordination, protective and equivocal silence. God's providence will, as we know, save man

from sinking into the final abyss but as our creative powers of making and separating, our communicative faculties will remain an ambiguous feature of human existence.

The first dialogical act is initiated by the serpent. This is especially significant as we would expect Adam and Eve to begin a discourse. There has been much controversy about the serpent's identity. Artistic renditions (such as Michelangelo's fresco in the Sistine Chapel) where the painter places the serpent around the trunk and branches of the tree, integrating the two beings into a single object (or subject), are particularly suggestive. In Eve's imagination, it was not a separate – and mysterious – being that “called” her but the tree itself, representing nature, all that is moving and unmoving.¹⁶ The deeper core of the serpent's identity remains hidden, but the text suggests a continuation of a close, though inimical, relation between the woman and the serpent, with further deceptions, animosity, but also curiosity. Scholars¹⁷ point out that the Hebrew words of being naked and curious is almost identical, and that the serpent itself is a “naked” animal (the allusion is especially strong, considering the molting of its skin regularly). Surely, our “curiosity” is instinctively related to our desire to see the other undressed, and nature “unskinned.” If the “serpent” and “nature,” that is, *creation without God*, are in a sense identical, then it follows that humans began to (try to) *communicate first with nature*, rather with one another, turning toward dust rather than spirit. Thus, the dialogue between Eve and the serpent turns out to be a meditative monologue over God's command. The dialogical form is already a deception.

The text, however short, is remarkably rich in queer questioning, false reporting, a struggle between obedience and the sudden discovery that God may be wrong, or worse, *Man's enemy*. The story reveals how the conversation goes fundamentally wrong. G. Miller observes that Eve's communication with the serpent has an evolutive character, leading from disobedience to disloyalty.¹⁸ It appears first a temptation to breach a command, but it then evolves to be a distrust of God's benevolence and the rejection of His authority. The conversation begins with a question, innocent as it seems, and it provides a possibility to confirm, to assent to God's command, and significantly, to correct the false assumption that God forbade the eating of *all* kinds of fruits in the garden. Note how the serpent's deceptive question insinuates that God has lied, from which it may follow that He wants Man to starve by using nature *against* Man. Who knows? – Eve might have thought, anticipating Pilate's famous question: “What is truth?” (Jn 18:38).

God did prohibit the consumption of a particular fruit. He may later choose to prohibit another one, and then another one. Unless we stop God, we are in lethal danger. That God is, after all, the *enemy* of Man, is an unfalsifiable assumption but it has been haunting us ever since the Fall.¹⁹ For the world is full of surprises and unless we conquer and “know” it throughout, we are in constant danger. This is the great truth, and nothing can disprove it, unless we really know that this is not true; but we need to know – so that we may know.

There is, thus, a robust political message conveyed to us, not just or mainly about the ways and means of manipulation and deception, but about the existential panic we feel when we are confronted with nature and its *powers* that have been created by God and who may use them against us. Hence, we must conquer them, and thereby subdue God. Once the Fall was accomplished, what Adam and Eve first realized was that they were *naked*, thus, *unprotected*. As I argued, nakedness reveals our shame, our powerlessness over ourselves, which entails our powerlessness over nature. Man hides in the Garden and means to use it against God as a weapon. Adam's first recorded words are “I heard you [God] in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself.” There is no sign of guilt or remorse, only fear, unprotectedness, exposedness, and the intention to use nature against God: almost a Hobbesian setting. The conflict between Man and God is already existential. God is now supposed to use nature against us, and we must learn the secrets of nature to overcome Him by turning against Him His own tools. There is a germ of the philosophy of science here, but for political thinking the real import is that our “communication with nature” produces distrust, which then leads to an existential fear of unknown forces. What follows is a vision of the world full of deception, as well as our obsession to identify our enemies, and to find our allies.²⁰

Due to the Fall, human communication has become essentially distorted. Truth is mingled with untruth through and through, and the *painful work* of separating them will remain with us. Our words are no longer those of recognition. Our default mode of communication is posing questions, which is generally held to be a good thing. However, our interpersonal questions are so often driven by distrust. “Who are you?” – this fundamental question always has a political shade of meaning, namely: “Whom do you serve?” Or: “What are your loyalties?” Our imitation of the existential imperative of God – “let it be” – is the existential counter-imperative of “let them not be.”

From this perspective, Cain's motive to kill (rather than, for instance, subdue) Abel, who can possibly *plot against him with God*, culminates in the existential imperative of causing the other non-to-be. The "political," in Carl Schmitt's sense, is the essence of Man's corrupted nature, with all our tremendous creative faculties aimed at annihilating God, not directly, but through killing His creatures; in the first place, His image.

Seeing and Goodness

The story of creation unfolds as a series of events and acts, and the text is interspersed with assertions that God "saw" that whatever He created was good. There are two exceptions: the sky (Strauss thinks it indicates a contra-Babylonian warning not to worship the heaven as such) and, perhaps surprisingly, Man, who is also not called "good." Pangle states that "[t] his faintly ominous omission is the sole hint of trouble in an otherwise blissful picture."²¹ Let us remember, however, that Man is created in the likeness of God Himself, who does not call Himself as good, either. Goodness is, nonetheless, a puzzling property, but no less enigmatic is the "action" – seeing – to which it is attached.

What is striking, as has been noted by many scholars, is that goodness does not refer to anything moral, where morality is understood in terms of rules, norms, principles, or virtues: "[a]rguably, God's evaluation of the world as good is not an invocation of moral value, since, at this stage, the goodness of the world is still irrelevant to moral conduct as not moral agents (other than God) exists."²² Rather, goodness seems to refer to something esthetically pleasing, and the creation story doubtlessly conveys an esthetical appreciation of God's work. The subsequent books of the Bible, the psalms and other songs praising God's creation, confirm this. Humans have a unique capacity to realize the values of order, harmony, perhaps beauty, all intrinsic to creation.²³ Further, goodness may also be related to life, prosperity, even evolution, a continuous increase of organic and complex value.²⁴ The point is that goodness is not connected to evil in any sense, except perhaps as an implicit prohibition to destroy goodness.

How can we account for the concept of "seeing"? It would be wild to suppose that God "discovers" the goodness of His creation, as humans discover the laws of nature. It is less wild to presume that God asserts His own goodness by the goodness of the creation and gives clues to us as to how God's goodness could be made sense of. Closer to the concept of

sovereignty, "seeing" may also mean an attitude of approval, assent, perhaps something that Aristotelian metaphysics and Scholastic theology would later term as "willing." Certainly, it would sound awkward to say that God "willed" that creation be good, but only if "willing" is considered an act separable from action. The distinction between willing and acting may be important and tenable in philosophy, and sometimes in practice, at least in the Western tradition with its subtle distinctions between intention, volition, and action. But the *Genesis* seems to use the term "seeing" in a similar function, that is, to capture a positive, affirmative attitude, with a touch of sovereignty. In Kass' summarizing words, the phrase "seeing that good" comprises the meanings of fitting to the intention, being fully functional, as well as "complete, perfect, fully formed and fully fit to do its proper work."²⁵

The first context in which "Man" and "goodness" jointly appear is where God finds that man is lonely, and that this is "not good." Thus, some aspect of "badness" emerges, though it is corrigible. And since "correction" is made in cooperation with Man, it has an *invitational* nature. Mittleman rightly observes that "goodness" develops here into a more dynamic concept, opening an evolutionary path.²⁶ This is symbolized by the "naming" activity of Man, as was argued, with God "merely" listening to, and "realizing" that Man is special, having a status beyond creation.

Once the dialogue between woman and serpent is over, *Genesis* tells us that the "woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom." The sentence repeats the earlier declaration that the "various trees" of the garden "were delightful to look and good for food," and that there was indeed a separate tree of life and another one of knowledge of good and bad. The main difference between the two propositions is that in the second case, it was the woman rather than God, who "saw that." The woman's "seeing" is already corrupted.²⁷ Whereas God's seeing is a statement of approval, Eve's seeing is an immediate desire of *appropriation*. Remember the serpent's role: its cold, unmoving but mesmerizing and contra-invitational eye represents the eye of Nature, rather than of God.²⁸ Nature "wants" to appropriate, to consume us, to follow all creatures that live on consuming other creatures. The Fall reveals that our way of making goodness grow begins with making personal gains. Our animal instinct of consuming the world overcomes and dominates our divine sense of approving goodness, preserving thereby our special status beyond creation by *not touching* it, and contribute to its development in a nondestructive way. This, of course,

presupposes free choice. A merely instinctive assent to God's will does not qualify as a human reaction, therefore the interpretation that "[e]very act of unstructured free choice (...) is an implicitly prideful act"²⁹ is hardly consistent with the status of Man over creation. Eve was at full liberty to reject the temptation for supernatural reasons.

When Eve and Adam saw that they were naked, they not only felt unprotectedness and potential death, but they also discovered each other's desire of appropriation of the other. Our sexual desire to possess the other is often more difficult to control than our desire to nurture our body. We often talk about a "thirst" and "appetite" "for power" (over others). These "acts of seeing" are similar, and the "opening of eyes" is really an unmasking of the other's appetite, of making their animal, rather than divine, instincts public. There emerges, however, an immediate urge to resist the *other's* appetite. The clothing or the city wall represent the immediate, physical obstacle to the unwanted intrusion of the other into our lives. But the tree of the knowledge of good and evil suggests another tool: morality.

Those who are inclined to think that the Fall was necessary to initiate Man into the knowledge of morality, point out that God Himself admits that Man has learnt something He only knew. But the knowledge of the good and bad proves to be a tool that we can use against each other by why of separating what the other is permitted and forbidden to see. Hence goodness acquires a new, moral property: "the biblical author proclaims the establishment of the moral as distinct from the natural order of the universe."³⁰ This property of goodness is, however, born in the context of retribution and punishment. Hence the tantalizing problem of the "goodness" of justice. Justice is constituted by the condemnation and punishment of evil (and by rewarding merits), but that also means that justice presupposes the existence of evil. By the Fall, Man acquired the moral sense of justice, but with it, inevitably, the *power* to cause suffering and to awaken revenge. Man initiated the paradox of goodness as having been partly constituted by evil, a paradox that has been haunting value ethicists ever since. The spiritual or, as Mittleman argues, the metaphysical aspect of goodness, which is commonly expressed as mercy (or mercifulness) and forgiveness, and which is divine in the sense that it aims at restoring the original goodness of creation when there was no destruction and death, appears to be incompatible with the moral imperative of justice.

The political theological implications of seeing and "seeing that good" are especially interesting. First, the

"seeing" of the political sovereign is a very strange combination of divine and human "seeing." Under the influence of Michel Foucault, considerable attention has been drawn to the seeing activities of authorities, but also the "watchdog" function of NGOs, and through them, the "electorate." There is not always an immediate sense of appropriation here. However, any violation of norms threatens with our instincts of appropriation going wild, and the Leviathan (either the state or the people) must *see to it* that this never happens. "Sovereign seeing," depicted on the Great Seal of the USA, itself a re-presentation of an idea of the all-seeing eye that has been with us from times immemorial, may thus be defined as an attitude of distrust, rather than of beneficial providence. When Adam and Eve hide themselves in the garden, they want not to be seen, and God agrees to participate in this miserable hide-and-go-seek game, calling Adam: "Where are you?" Here God does not "see" as God. This is already the only "seeing" Man now understands, namely, a "seeing" that is from now on essentially tied to the desire of appropriation, the corresponding drive to hide (ourselves or whatever we possess), and the urge to unmask any such desire. In a sense, then, it is by the Fall the Man inaugurates God into the role of the Supreme Political Leader, thereby of course distorting His image as Creator, but gaining in exchange the underlying image of the Supreme Judge.

But the political theology of the *Genesis* makes it clear that morality is a result of the Fall, and that goodness is a concept that resists full understanding and human command. For it includes mercy and forgiveness which transcend politics; it is the spiritual-theological aspect of sovereignty, rather than morality, which part and parcel of our post-Edenic political condition, that politics has so much difficulty to handle. Goodness as "seen" by God escapes the political sovereign.

Rest and Silence

The final act attributed to God, upon completing the "work" of creation, is to take rest and withdraw from activity. God's final act is non-action, but as a non-action it is still essentially related to creation, and in this sense, it is an action, after all. It is another separation, though in this case without words. Perhaps God ceased to speak (call everything into being) in order to separate speech from silence; but silence in the sense of waiting for an answer, as inaction is often a silent call for action by another agent. God withdraws but makes Himself thereby present in the whole creation.

Man is not told to rest. The celebration of the Sabbath by refraining from labor is only implicitly suggested. On the contrary, he is told to cultivate the garden, rule over the world, and subdue it. The verb “rule” (*radah*) can be an intimidating and, especially from an ecologist’s point of view, a foreboding term, especially if the next verb in the text of the Genesis, “subdue” (*kabash*) – namely, all non-human creatures – is added. A possible rejoinder may be to point out that the term is not meant to be more than stewardship, a vicarious rule of a God who is presumed to be good.³¹ It is also possible to read to the text as an intentional contrast between this caring and the all-too-familiar tyrannical rule that the princes of the post-Fall world exercise. If this is indeed the case, then it follows that the *Genesis* introduces the virtual distinction between two kinds of political rule. However, since we have no direct information on how ideal human rule would have looked like, all we can do is to rely on what we learn about God’s attitude toward the creation. This is an affirmative and resounding “amen” to the existence of the world and its elements, by “seeing” that everything is “good,” although “goodness” is amendable; its joyful study (“naming” things); the art and practice of separation and unification on the highest possible level (our intellectual faculties, including philosophy); the discovery and practice of our creative powers (formation of things and relating them to one another); and finally, though most dangerously, communication “with ourselves,” which includes “among ourselves” as well. Briefly, vicarious rule is continuous with God’s rule, and consistent with our having been created in the likeness of God who has taken rest, so that Man can continue with amending creation on his own.

A political theology of “God’s rest” has been outlined by Giorgio Agamben. He has argued that it belongs to the essence of sovereignty that it does not operate: “At the beginning and the end of the highest power there stands, according to Christian theology, a figure not of action and government but inoperativity.”³² Judaism’s celebration of the Sabbath, and other Pagan politico-religions with the custom of ritually revering the empty throne of the absent emperor, also symbolize the idea of a sovereign that is and that is not. Agamben’s genealogical research is doubtlessly invaluable, but his separation of passive and *empty* sovereignty and active rule reflects the *distorted* post-Fall political condition. Initially, there was a fundamental continuity between God’s withdrawal and Man’s rule, rather than a complete rupture. The Fall did not invalidate the first command to Man to rule over creation. But it is indeed a consequence of the

Fall that God’s withdrawal can convince Man of God’s disappearance or indifference and tempt Man to usurp the empty throne.

Originally, God’s rest and silence were reminders of His work and voice. Man can be presumed to have been invited to contemplate and meditate over creation, preparing himself for action on behalf of the Creator. The post-Fall political sovereign can indeed try to imitate this structure by withdrawal, rest, and silence. More precisely, the political sovereign can be, and perhaps must be, represented as such, so that politicians can claim to respond to it with belief, resolution, and action. Be it His/Her Majesty, or the People, or the Nation, the first virtue of the political leader is to show dedication by actively serving it. However, without God, the throne *is* indeed empty. Its emptiness is, thus, bound to become more and more conspicuous, in a twisted analogy to Andersen’s tale about Emperor’s clothes, which reveals the nakedness of the sovereign, and with it, its complete absurdity. Adam’s and Eve’s loincloths was necessary to cover each other’s insight into the emptiness of their divine pretensions.

Post-Fall political leadership clothes itself into constant action: “[T]he fall’ was a melancholy passage from a purely contemplative state to the order of action, of politics,”³³ while it is constantly tempted to sit in the empty throne. The political sovereign, contrary to Agamben’s presumptions, absorbs the restlessness of Man. Carl Schmitt rightly defined the sovereign in terms of constant decision-making, which is, however, a tacit acknowledgment that Man *cannot really imitate God’s rest*. Much as labor, and with it, the anxiety over one’s livelihood, is a punishment, so politics is a daily business, full of anxiety and contingency, which cannot pretend not to be active for long.

The Prohibition

God’s pre-Fall communication with man consists in the command of multiplication (though this applies to all creatures), rule over creation and cultivate Eden, as well as the prohibition to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. Let me finally reflect on the meaning of prohibition, the violation of which precipitated the Fall. What was behind the prohibition? Some think that nothing special: “[n]o explanation is offered, and none is requested. The man, Adam, understands by virtue of his having been brought into existence, that he has incurred an obligation to obey the demands imposed upon him by his divine parent, whether or not reason is provided.”³⁴ But there is at

least a tension in need of explanation between our exaltation above whole creation over having received the office of God's lieutenant, and our exclusive exclusion from part of creation. Prohibition is hardly a simple tool of parental education.

The prohibition to eat from a particular tree applies to Man only, which reinforces the impression, confirmed by a long tradition of interpretation from Augustine to Luther, that the tree has a significance, the entirety of which is revealed by Adam's and Eve's action, hence their refusal to obey was necessary to give meaning to the tree. But "prohibition" stands in a striking contrast to the other command, namely, to "cultivate" Eden, that is, creation in its entirety. Nonetheless, they are *jointly issued*, which already puzzles Man.

Presumably, most readers of *Genesis* have less trouble with cultivation, despite its *being also a command*. We feel it to be more in accord with our instinctive self-confidence. Where we always stumble is the point about prohibition, as it tells us to stop asking questions, to stop short of learning about goodness and evil. For it would have been quite natural to assume that without "knowing" the prohibited tree, a proper cultivation of the garden would be, in effect, impossible. Prohibition looks irrational and unnatural, as it contradicts the first command of cultivation, and is already tormenting Man and begins to strain his relation to God.

What Man seems to have overseen in this moment was that if God wants to give to Man the divine capacity *to separate* (as well as to unify) things, then the command which forbids the eating of a particular fruit is another form of *invitation* to have a share in God's self-denial to absorb creation. We learn then that Eve "saw" that its fruit was good, which it was indeed in terms of every aspect of goodness intended by God, and she decided to break the prohibition. The immediate interpretation is that this was disobedience and an act of disloyalty against God and His sovereign authority. However, the terms of disobedience and revolt narrow the full meaning of their action. If the command to rule has an evident invitational character, why could not we think of the prohibition as having a similarly invitational character? God invited Man to share His own self-imposed prohibition to "know" bad and evil, giving to Man a chance to co-rule creation by similarly *disowning* some part of it. One may be "tempted," as it were, to impute to God a certain arbitrariness (the lack of reason), a sheer desire to show to Man who is the real Lord over creation, or at best some inscrutable intentions. But such speculations are indeed childish, and most

probably result from our distorted theological intelligence. Should Eve have rejected to taste the fruit, she would have simply participated in God's sovereignty, understood as a self-imposed prohibition, the stopping of the natural chain of consumption and absorption, ultimately, the act of generosity and non-destruction.

On this interpretation, the reference to "death" is not a vengeful God's threat. Before the Fall, "death" had no meaning. Therefore the "sanction" of death was nothing but a warning about the possibility of "returning to dust" rather than accepting God's life in its fullness. Thus, the prohibition did indeed have no "natural reason." It was, rather, an invitation to say *no* to evil by joining God in being a sovereign ruler over creation.

And once again, what Man immediately does after the Fall, is to use his corrupted sovereign power to make prohibitions. First, *vis-à-vis* one another by covering their nudity, and secondly, by prohibiting God to see them. Here we see clearly how *Genesis* destroys any pretensions of a post-Fall analogy between divine and human sovereignty: *analogy* degenerates into a *parody*. It is certainly a majestic right of any political sovereign, a monarch, a legislative body, or the people acting in concert, to establish norms and institutions. However, and in fact, the civic code and the attaching penal code, surely cornerstones of any political order, aim at hardly more than the protection of rights (usually unevenly distributed). There is nothing majestic about them, they merely make life tolerable outside of Eden. We can pretend to have the power to create prohibitions *ex nihilo*, as it were. But in reality, this power is a faint reminder of our original sovereignty, reduced to an institutionalized power to protect ourselves against one another – either individually or collectively.

Conclusion

In this essay, I argued that the "political" and political theoretical reading of *Genesis* must begin with the creation stories: the concepts and images used in there justify this without further ado, notwithstanding the observation that the first polity was founded by Cain, well after the Fall. In the creation stories, the Fall of Man is commonly attributed to disobedience, thus, Cain's murderous act was preceded by Adam's and Eve's sin, hence it seems that the Bible seems to teach that politics, understood as it is in terms of command and obedience, subjection and deference, belongs to our fallen nature.

I challenged this view insofar as I argued that by analyzing the main acts of God and Man *before* the Fall we can identify important faculties that came

indeed be distorted *by* the Fall but were not created by it. In particular, I argued first that separation and unification are of paramount importance, as they signify sovereign rulership. Before the Fall, Adam performs the act of unification by recognition (of Eve's – the other's – sameness); after the Fall, Man chooses to unify mankind with Nature (eating the fruit) rather than with God, and our experience of full unification can no longer happen without carnal possession. Our sovereign faculty of separation turns into a power of defence and protection, and our faculty of unification is tainted with force and intrusion. Secondly, our communicative faculties undergo similar corruption. God calls things into being, and Man was given the power to name them, and in an ultimate act of naming, calling "the other" as "the Other" into being. As a result of choosing nature and creation, rather than God, to be our partner of communication, first instantiated by the dialogue with the serpent, our communication is degraded to a means of hiding the truth. By asking and speaking, we often display distrust and suspicion toward the other, notwithstanding our better intentions. Third, whereas "seeing that good" is a divine faculty, it also became distorted by a different sort of seeing, as told in the story of the Fall, with Eve's seeing the goodness of the fruit resulting in its consumption (appropriation). The new meaning of "goodness" constitutes morality (Man's eyes were "opened"). However, in it we often experience conflicts as well as the scandalous truth that moral goodness in any association of men must be enforced, on the widest scale, by means of politics which, in turn, wrestles with its own evil tendencies. Nonviolent goodness remains unattainable in human society. Fourth, although God's rest must be followed as a command, due to the Fall, the nature of this Sabbath remains a mystery to us. It is not inactivity; nor is it, however, an incessant hustle and worrying over the issues of the world. The damage done to our faculty of comprehending God's rest results in either a worship of empty political sovereignty or in an obsession with constant decision-making. Fifth, I argued that contrary to the common understanding of the prohibition (of eating from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad), assumes that God as master of Man wished to test him, or, worse perhaps, wanted to make His sovereignty fully manifest, the prohibition was an invitation to imitate Him in His withdrawal from creation, to leave something untouched. After the Fall, Man's divine faculty to make sovereign prohibitions to himself, has degenerated into a series of prohibitions, always applied to the other.

In sum: *Genesis* teaches us that our political powers are distorted faculties created by God before the Fall. Political theology needs to alert political theory whenever it seems to forget our politically fallen nature.

Notes

1. Yoram Hazony, "The Bible and Leo Strauss," *Perspectives on Political Science* 45, no. 3 (2016): 190–207.
2. Hillel Fradkin, "God's Politics – Lessons from The Beginning," *This World* 4 (1983): 86–104; Martin Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically. An Introduction to Mosaic Political Philosophy* (Westport, London: Praeger, 2002); Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom. Reading Genesis* (Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Geoffrey P. Miller, "Origin of Obligation: Genesis 2:4b-3:24," *NYU*, October 26, 2009; Michael Walzer, *In God's Shadow. Politics in the Hebrew Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
3. Fradkin, "God's Politics – Lessons from The Beginning."
4. *Ibid.*, 92.
5. "Man" (capitalized) refers to mankind. No gender issues will be involved in this discussion, and the masculine form will be preserved for sake of grammatical consistency.
6. Leo Strauss, "Interpretation of Genesis," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 1, no. 1/2 (1989): 77–92. Martin Sicker poses the same hypothesis: "As a unique being on earth, the lieutenant of the Creator, it would not be surprising if man were to being to imagine that his authority there is absolute, analogous to *Elohim's* sovereignty over the heavens above." Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 17.
7. A reviewer noted that God's intellect may not be penetrable to His creatures, including humans. This is both theologically and philosophically highly probable, and that is why I stressed the intelligibility is restrained to creation. It is possible to deny even that much, but my point is a modest assertion that our knowledge of creation is reliable, progressively deepening, and essentially different from the knowledge of other species (the simplest creature can have 'reliable' knowledge but only of its *environment*).
8. Thomas L. Pangle (Thomas L. Pangle, *Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham* (Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007) discusses the unity and coherence of the two stories in detail. His conclusion is that notwithstanding the differences of the two accounts, they were deliberately concatenated in a way that betray a conviction that God has revealed truths in both accounts that cannot be, in the end, contradictory. The political philosophical analysis offered in this paper certainly confirms this methodological stipulation. Sicker's (*Reading Genesis Politically*) view is similar.
9. Geoffrey Miller (Origin of Obligation: Genesis 2:4b-3:24) writes that knowledge in the Bible amounts "to have an active, *lived involvement* in the matter" (28). I think it is more than that: it is mastery, but in the fall, and ever since, such mastery has had a tinge of

- power. Or more than that: perhaps all knowledge is, in a strong sense, political.
10. In Sicker's words, it „is man's reaction to the divine command that will determine whether the tree will become the source of the knowledge of good and evil" (*Reading Genesis Politically*, 14).
 11. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 67. David Velleman ("The Genesis of Shame," *Philosophy Public Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2001): 27–52) has argued similarly: we are constantly worried about others' opinions and want to protect our public self. The naked body reveals most forcefully that we are not full masters over ourselves.
 12. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 116.
 13. Walzer, *In God's Shadow*.
 14. Kass also attributes great significance of our capability of naming, in which he discovers our faculty of separating and combining, seeing the differences and the similarities between creatures; thereby creating a mirror of the creation within the human mind. He also notes that Man was not lonely psychologically but metaphysically (*The Beginning of Wisdom*, 73–77). However, his stipulation that Adam's recognition of Eve as his own flesh "seems to have been incited by desire, almost certainly by sexual desire" (78) is unacceptable, and rather incoherent with his previous reasoning. There is absolutely no sexual desire presupposed.
 15. Thus, I disagree with G. Miller's view that the "Eden story presents a simple but general model of political organization: a small society that exists within a well-defined territory, containing citizens and a household as well as a government, organized according to law..." (Origin of Obligation: Genesis 2:4b-3:24, 6). Political concepts are certainly there, but the 'Edenic community' is not a political model for the fallen Man, as this would presuppose the possibility of returning to it.
 16. Sicker also points out that Eve's blaming the serpent for having deceived her is an implicit way of blaming God who created the serpent, which makes it a representative of nature: "In effect, her defense was that she had been deceived by nature" (Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 35).
 17. For more details, see Mike Gadd, "A New Look at an Old, Subtle Serpent: Naked in Genesis 3:1," *Studia Antiqua* 5, no. 1 (2007): 109–114.
 18. Miller, "Origin of Obligation: Genesis 2:4b-3:24."
 19. Contemplating Eve's state of mind after having eaten from the forbidden fruit, Sicker argues that the point was not God's immediate punishment (which was not to happen) but Eve's bewilderment about not having happened anything. "She felt the same, but was she really the same? What if the threat were not of an immediate death but, rather, of a death to come at another time of the Creator's choosing, a death without forewarning? Her anxiety soon turned into fear" (Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 28, italics added).
 20. Pangle (*Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*) also notes that the Hebrew Bible attributes a considerable lesser significance to friendship than Platonic—Aristotelian political and moral philosophy does.
 21. *Ibid.*, 57.
 22. Alan Mittleman, "The Durability of Goodness," In *Judaic Sources and Western Thought. Jerusalem's Enduring Presence*, ed. Jonathan A. Jacobs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 21–48.
 23. Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 9.
 24. Mittleman (The Durability of Goodness) also advances the same point about the intrinsicity of 'growth' to goodness.
 25. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom*, 39.
 26. Mittleman, "The Durability of Goodness."
 27. "[T]he woman, before she eats it, has already made a judgment that the is 'good for food' (...) The woman judges for herself, on the basis of her own autonomous knowing of good and bad, that to eat is good" (Mittleman, "The Durability of Goodness," 65, original italics).
 28. I am reminded here of Edgar A. Poe's short story, *The Man and the Snake*. The protagonist finds a snake under his bed, looking at him. He is both hypnotized and terrorized, cannot move, and eventually, dies of horror. In a final twist, the snake turns out to have been a dead and stuffed animal. Poe captures the point very well: the eyes look lively and inviting, yet their 'invitation' turns out to have been hollow, meaningless, in fact, both calling the man to death and causing him to die.
 29. *Ibid.*, 66.
 30. Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 14.
 31. Stead 2010.
 32. Giorgio Agamben, *The Kingdom and the Glory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 242.
 33. Mittleman, "The Durability of Goodness," 32.
 34. Sicker, *Reading Genesis Politically*, 13. Pangle (*Political Philosophy and the God of Abraham*) also contends that the *Genesis*, and the Bible generally, favors family over friendship, and patriarchal rule over philia-based political rule. Given the suspicions of the Bible over the possible political theological usurpations of divine sovereignty, the implicit criticism of the Hellenic polis is hardly deniable, but it does not follow that any other *political model* is recommended.

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