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Abstract

In this study I examine the scholarship of the last few decades which has revisited the Genesis creation narratives for their potential to yield an exegesis that does not relegate women, queer people, or transgender people to a secondary status in the text. I go systematically through the first three chapters of Genesis, synthesizing various hermeneutical approaches by Hebrew Bible scholars, activists, archaeologists, journalists, and theologians to evaluate the validity of their claims of equality and inclusion in light of their preservation of the sex and gender binaries, which cannot easily, if at all, be separated from heterosexist cissexist patriarchy. To address the sex and gender binary created in the first narrative, I focus on readings of Genesis 1:27 as the creation of a sexually dimorphic species that includes a wide range of sexuated manifestations. The male primogeniture and potential for gender roles of Genesis 2 are addressed by emphasizing the creation of gender primarily for the purpose of distinguishing self from other. In Genesis 3, the curses can be read as the unfortunate hierarchical consequence of the introduction of power and the ability to exploit that comes from knowledge of good and evil, a product of human failing rather than a divine preference for gender inequality. I conclude that a trans- woman- and queer-inclusive exegesis is possible through combining elements of various scholars' interpretations.

Introduction

In the beginning, there was binary. The very first chapter in the Bible sets the standard for the practice of dividing and categorizing, creating order out of chaos. Genesis 1 describes the deity's systematic creation and separation of the formless void into recognizable features of life on earth: the sun and the moon, the sea and the sky, day and night. As the narrative has been read over the millennia, a polarized framework of understanding the world's features has developed which places a given phenomenon's relationship to its opposite at the center of its definition. Night is read as the opposite of day, light as the opposite of dark, and female as the opposite of male. But does the text itself promote such oppositional binaries?

In his infamously inflammatory article posted December 2015 in the *Jewish Journal* online, Dennis Prager condemns the recent trend in many Jewish communities of making efforts to be intentionally inclusive to transgender members of the congregation. His main argument can be boiled down in this statement: "For the Torah, the distinction between men and women is

fundamental to creating civilization. When the human being is created, the Torah emphasizes: ‘Male and female He created them.’”¹ Believing he has found sufficient evidence to make his claim that being transgender is a violation of *halachah* (Jewish law), the conservative radio talk show host focuses the remainder of his article on bathroom panic² and condemning race-based Affirmative Action.

What this man who claims to use “the Torah as [his] guide” fails to recognize is the sheer ignorance of taking words from the Torah at face value, without context, and applying ancient words and concepts unproblematically to modern notions of “male” and “female.” What constitutes masculinity/femininity (or the standards by which male/female-identified people strive for) and even the definition of “male” and “female” has varied not only through history but also culture, class, race, generation, and even periods within an individual’s own life.³ Many are quick to point out that despite varying standards and values imposed throughout history, culture, etc., the *genders* “male” and “female” are constructed in correspondence to physical, anatomical characteristics, or the *sexes* “male” and “female.” These sexes are typically determined by five factors being in alignment: conformity of genitalia to two fixed shapes, location of gonads (internal or external), possession of XX or XY chromosomes, the presence/absence of certain secondary sex characteristics, and the ratio of specific hormones. It would certainly be convenient for doctors if every human body fell easily and consistently into either one category or the other for all of those characteristics combined, however that is simply not the reality. In

¹ Dennis Prager, “The Torah and the Transgendered,” *Jewish Journal*, December 2, 2015.

² “Bathroom panic” refers to a tactic used against the normalization of transgender existence by inciting ill-founded fears of “men dressed as women” coming into women’s bathrooms and endangering women and children.

³ Marcia C. Inhorn, *The New Arab Man: Emergent Masculinities, Technologies, and Islam in the Middle East* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 46.

fact, modern estimates place the likelihood of someone's body differing from standard "male" or "female" categories at 1.728%, or almost one in fifty people.⁴

Thus, if it can be concluded that "male" and "female" are imprecise, variable terms in today's world, how can they be understood in a text written 3,000 years ago? In recent years, many theologians and religious scholars have begun using queer, transgender, and feminist theory to return to the beginning, so to speak, to examine the implications for gender roles, relations, and inequalities that the Biblical narratives about the first humans present. The story of humanity's creation in particular provides a strong case for modern exegesis over other Biblical narratives, as the story is often viewed not just as a recollection of the first humans' experiences but also as a mold into which all humans must fit, as divinely-constructed beings. Archaeologist and Hebrew Bible scholar Carol Meyers distinguishes these two approaches as *prototypical*, or an etiology purporting to explain how things came to be, versus *archetypical*, which endeavors to reveal some timeless essential truth about human nature, and can in turn have serious influence on the construction of ideals well beyond the time period of the story.⁵ One may recall in particular the slogan of those opposing marriage equality in the years before it was instituted in the US, "It's Adam and Eve, not Adam and Steve," as a particularly revealing example of embedded prescriptivist assumptions about the creation narrative. The slogan assumes that since Adam and Eve, as the first humans, were a heterosexual couple, the only permissible type of couple is a heterosexual one. The creation narrative's interpretation is additionally complicated by the divine component of the story, as those who give merit to the text as scripture must grapple with the fact that it is God who ostensibly creates humanity along a gender binary and

⁴ Melanie Blackless, "How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis," *American Journal of Human Biology* 12, no. 2 (2000): 159.

⁵ Carol Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 80.

later curses the first couple with gender inequality. The stakes of interpretation, ultimately, are incredibly high: one's hermeneutical conclusions have the power to imply God's condemnation or endorsement of gender equality as well as the way humanity fundamentally is and/or ought to be.

The motivations for this renewed attention are as varied as the interpretations that come out of it. Some look for evidence to support their political claims, others look to find hidden spiritual truths that promote more egalitarian conclusions, and still others look for personal validation of their own identities as women and transfolk. There is similarly great variety in approach. Some of the first feminist hermeneutical scholars of Genesis—Phyllis Trible, Carol Meyers, and Mieke Bal—use literary analysis which views the text as “an interlocking structure of words and motifs” and “organic unity.”⁶ Trible employs rhetorical criticism, using what Hebrew Bible scholar Ogden Bellis calls a “redemptive strategy” for feminist hermeneutics, which “seeks to redeem scripture from patriarchal confines,” while Bal approaches the text through narratology and speech act theory. Meyers also attempts to situate the content within the context of Ancient Israelite society, providing insight into Israelite gender roles and the agrarian family structure.⁷ Elliot Wolfson and Daniel Boyarin analyze the text through the framework of later interpretations, namely the Zohar and a contrast between Philo of Alexandria/early Christianity and early Rabbinical traditions, respectively.⁸ Rachel Adler and Joy Ladin frame the

⁶ Phyllis Trible, “Clues in a Text,” in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 8, 9; Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*; Mieke Bal, *Lethal Love: Feminist Literary Readings of Biblical Love Stories* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987).

⁷ Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 18.

⁸ Elliot R. Wolfson, “Bifurcating the Androgyne and Engendering Sin: A Zoharic Reading of Gen 1-3,” in *Hidden Truths From Eden: Esoteric Readings of Genesis 1-3*, ed. Caroline Vander Stichele and Susanne Scholz (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014); Daniel Boyarin, “Gender,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

story as the creation of not only the natural world, but also the oppressive structures identified in feminist theory as gender hierarchy, heterosexism, and the construction of gender along a binary. They join many others in a study of the text that identifies alternatives to a divine ordination of the oppressive structures, concluding in a much more optimistic light.

One factor that ultimately each of the interpreters must contend with is the duality of the narrative itself, as Genesis 1:1-2:3 clearly conveys a contradicting order and method of creation than that which follows in Genesis 2:4-3:24. The first story recounts the creation of the world in six days, culminating in the creation of humanity as “male and female” on the sixth day, while the second starts with the creation of the figure *adam*, for whom God wishes to find a counterpart, ultimately pulling a rib from the sleeping *adam* to create a woman, *isha*, who is later named *Chava*, or Eve. Presuming that the narratives are pieces of the canonized whole that is Torah, within which its role as scripture implies that both must be “true,” how does one account for contradiction? Jewish thinkers have puzzled over this dilemma since the text’s inception, from the Mishnah (Genesis Rabbah 8:1, Talmud Bavli B’rakhot 61a, Eruvin 18a) to Kabbalists in the early modern period, to Jewish feminists and religious scholars today. Some choose to write off one narrative as “wrong” or “sexist,” perhaps even suggesting different author sources as outlined in the documentary hypothesis, while others shrug and take the two narratives as evidence for the many contradictions that seem to be a part of life.⁹ There are additionally a number of creative interpretations that account for both stories as being part of a cohesive whole.

⁹ Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 142–43. Rachel Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1998), 114 (?). Namely, that the first narrative was written by the P source and the second by the J source. Joy Ladin, “Torah In Transition” (Transtorah.org, 2014), 8.

These present Genesis 1-3 most frequently as a singular linear narrative, though occasionally a scholar will suggest one narrative is a midrashic explanation of the other.¹⁰

This binary of stories at odds with each other is arguably symbolic of the daunting task facing a feminist exegesis. Just as there is tension in acknowledging difference between two narratives that are both supposed to be true as given by God, approaching the notion of difference between men and women within an approach that maintains inherent equality between the two yields many logistical and theoretical concerns. In both cases, acknowledging the difference leads to differing valuations of the two: to acknowledge narratives as different prompts a question of which one is “right,” while asserting essential difference between men and women justifies the application of different roles. Some scholars do contend that there can be equality despite fundamental difference in the form of sexual dimorphism and distinct gender roles and identities, though other feminist scholars find this conclusion impossible.¹¹ Boyarin highlights the inevitable inequality that stems from linking specific unchangeable (or at least, difficult to change) bodily features to definitions of categories that manifest hierarchically, as such an approach will ultimately trap its members within bodily roles.¹² Some seek to avoid this issue of difference through emphasizing the “oneness” of the first human, though again other scholars are quick to jump on the overwhelmingly male-normative ways in which a single being which is both male and female is often portrayed, as the male is considered the unmarked standard of humanity and the female is marked as the Other which serves to provide balance.¹³

¹⁰ Wolfson, “Bifurcating the Androgyne,” 96.

¹¹ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*; Bal, *Lethal Love*; Emmanuel Levinas, “And God Created Woman,” in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. Annette Aronowicz (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

¹² Boyarin, “Gender,” 132.

¹³ Boyarin, “Gender”; Wolfson, “Bifurcating the Androgyne”; Judith Plaskow, “Dismantling the Gender Binary within Judaism: The Challenge of Transgender to Compulsory Heterosexuality,” in *Balancing on the Mechitza*, ed. Noach Dzmura (Berkeley, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 2010).

Alternatively, drawing on her own experience as a trans woman who has often felt distanced from the ready-made categories of “man” and “woman,” Yeshiva University professor and transgender theologian Joy Ladin proposes another view of gender beyond the binary which emphasizes a more open-ended distinction of “self” versus “other.”¹⁴ She would argue that it is not any specific differences, but rather difference itself, that defines the relationship between the first humans and thus the construction of gender.

In the upcoming sections I will go step by step through the first three chapters of Genesis, highlighting the scholars’ focal points and putting their interpretations in conversation with one another and also with activists and theologians who have focused on the topic, as the ideas presented have been developed through dialogue between these different groups. My point of departure from the existing texts is an inherent suspicion of socially constructed binary, as a factor that frames many hermeneutical approaches. I do, however, maintain that a plurality of voices and perspectives is critical for developing a more complete understanding of the challenges to and support for an inclusive reading of the text.

It was Tribble’s 1978 book “*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*” that first situated feminist approaches to the Hebrew Bible in discourse around the creation narratives, which directly prompted the approaches employed by Mieke Bal in 1987, Carol Meyers in 1991, and Rachel Adler in 1998 to the same text.¹⁵ As feminist approaches to Jewish Studies have expanded, authors such as David Biale use Tribble’s work in discussions of other feminist topics, including sexuality. Amongst the increase in use of the text for liberatory hermeneutics, the topic also sees a number of critics to the possibility of gender equality in the text. Emmanuel Levinas uses the

¹⁴ Joy Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity” (Unpublished, 2018), 28.

¹⁵ Tribble, “Clues in a Text”; Bal, *Lethal Love*; Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*; Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*.

Talmud's clarification to emphasize the text's relegation of the sexual and thus the feminine to a secondary category, an Other by which the self (man) can differentiate selfhood.¹⁶ Daniel Boyarin echoes Levinas' conclusion eight years later that when reading the text through the interpretations of the Talmudic rabbis, women are trapped within restrictive bodily roles.¹⁷ Wolfson concludes similarly in his analysis of the Zohar's interpretation of the text.

After the turn of the millennia we see a shift in the focus of the creation story's interpreters, as queer and trans activism prompt similar rounds of renewed attention on the verse. More recent writers tend to focus less on line-by-line hermeneutics but rather employ what Bellis calls an "essentialist approach" in which "texts that are timeless... take priority over texts that speak to a particular historical situation."¹⁸ This approach, as Prager points out, tends to prioritize more liberal values such as compassion over complex discussions of *halachah*, and as such tends to focus on the positive themes that resonate within the text and ignore the more limiting elements of the text.¹⁹ This is done most notably by Ladin, though the topic also has expanded out of academia and continues with activists and theologians in public forums who wish to make a case for transgender inclusiveness within Judaism. In light of the recent attention by theologians and activists, as well as the rich history of feminist hermeneutics of the creation narratives, I will use the framework of modern gender theory to problematize previous discourse. I will in turn evaluate each argument's potential for the full inclusion of women and LGBTQIAP*²⁰ people within the Genesis narratives' text.

¹⁶ Levinas, "And God Created Woman."

¹⁷ Boyarin, "Gender," 132.

¹⁸ Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, and Heroes*, 17.

¹⁹ Prager, "The Torah and the Transgendered."

²⁰ That is, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (which includes those beyond the gender binary), Queer (a catch-all for other identities not mentioned), Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, * because there are always more identities not mentioned and thus the phrase is inherently problematic. It is, for now, the best known phrase to describe the

Genesis 1

Gen. 1:26 And God said, Let us make [humanity] in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. **27** So God created humanity in God's own image, in the image of God God created [hir]; male and female God created them.²¹

כּו וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ;
וַיְרִדוּ בְדִגְתַּי הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם, וּבַבְּהֵמָה וּבְכָל-
הָאָרֶץ, וּבְכָל-הָרֶמֶשׂ, הָרֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ.
כּז וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ, בְּצַלְמֵם
אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ: זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה, בָּרָא אֹתָם.²²

In Chapter 1 of Genesis, there are two verses that most thinkers focus on in terms of the genesis of gender: 26 and 27. In 1:26 God decides to make *adam* in Hir²³ image, using a singular noun for Hir human creation. This singular usage is repeated in the first half of 1:27, before turning plural in the second half with the introduction of the phrase *zachar u'nekeva*, or “male and female.” This has led to a variety of interpretations as to whether the verses describe one being that is both “male and female” or two beings, one of each, or even still a metaphorical meaning of a sexually diverse humankind. I will outline each of these varieties of interpretation respectively, evaluating each for their potential to be inclusive to all sex/gender identities.

Adam as a Single Being

The main source of diversity among interpretations of *adam* as a single creature is the role that sex, gender, and sexuality²⁴ play in this first instance of humanity. One of the oldest

community that tends to include people of the above identities. In the future I will refer to this group as “Queer,” while respectfully acknowledging that this is a reclaimed slur that not everyone may feel comfortable with.

²¹ Translation by Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 7.

²² *Mechon-Mamre: Bible and Mishneh Torah for All* (Jerusalem, Israel: Mechon Mamre, 1998). All Hebrew and translations of the Hebrew are from Mechon Mamre unless otherwise specified. I regularly edit the translations to avoid writing gender into places where scholars disagree about its presence.

²³ Ze, hir, hir's and hirself are all gender-neutral pronouns that I will be employing to refer to beings whose gender is unclear or irrelevant (mostly *adam* and God). I will be avoiding using the singular pronoun “they” for the purposes of clarity, as it is a point of great contention amongst my sources whether the *adam* was one or two individuals; thus, the reader can determine that my use of the word “they” in this particular context will imply plurality.

²⁴ To define my terms: My use of the word sex refers to the assignment of a label under a binary of anatomical characteristics centered on reproductive capacity. Gender should be understood as the characteristics of personality traits and behavior assigned to individuals who have been categorized into one of two sexes. Sexuality is defined as

recorded commentaries on the subject reads the first being as lacking any kind of sex. Boyarin's analysis of Philo of Alexandria's writing reveals the first human as an entirely spiritual being.²⁵ Devoid of gender or sex, Philo connects this creature exclusively to the "image of God" (a recurring theme which I will discuss more deeply on page 23). He distinguishes the *adam* created in 1:27 from the *adam* created in the second Genesis narrative, who although also created as a single being is different from this first, spiritual *adam*. As Philo writes, "For there are *two* races of men, the one made after the (Divine) Image, and the one molded out of the earth... With the second man a helper is associated."²⁶ It is clear that the first, spiritual *adam* is preferred in Philo's writings, as Boyarin explains, "for many Hellenistic Jews, the oneness of pure spirit is ontologically privileged in the constitution of humanity. Putting this into more secular terms... the essence of the human subject precedes its accidental division into sexes. The 'true self'... exists before being assigned a gender."²⁷ As such, for one to be pious in the "image of God," one must forgo ties to gender, sex, and sexuality.

This might seem initially uplifting as one attempts to separate the social constructions of sex and gender from an "essential" human existence, however, its traditional application has been deeply problematic. For many philosophers from Philo's time to the modern day, "gender" has been synonymous with "female,"²⁸ while men have been considered the unmarked standard from which women deviate. Boyarin labels this phenomenon a "masculine neutrality," whereby a return to a more pious state requires men to forgo only sexuality, yet women must forgo that

the relation of an individual to the erotic and sexual desire, often involving another person, and often constructed along assumptions of another's (binary) sex.

²⁵ Boyarin, "Gender," 120.

²⁶ Philo, "Legum Allegoria," in *Loeb Classics Philo*, trans. F. H. Colson, vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1929), 107.

²⁷ Boyarin, "Gender," 120.

²⁸ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1056.

which marks them as women, in sex (body), gender (role), and sexuality. This is due in part to traditional definitions of woman which are so often linked inextricably to the body, the object of sexual activity, and roles of childbearing and motherhood, whereas to be male is much less linked to a role in reproduction besides being the sexual subject. In this sense, sexuality is seen as a part of men's *behavior*, and thus they can choose not to do it, whereas for women it is part of their definition as the object to which the subject does sexual action, and thus much harder to escape without escaping the label of woman itself. For this reason, women tend to be tied exclusively to the realm of the body whereas men are able to dwell in the realms of both the body and the spiritual, intellectual, and metaphysical realms. In conclusion, Boyarin writes, "transcendence, liberation of the female, seems always to be predicated on a denigration of the body and the achievement of a male-modeled androgyny, a masculine neutral.... The opposition between 'genuine, spiritual' and 'false, physical' seems to me, however, no comfort but simply a reinstatement of masculinism by other means."²⁹ This oppositional dichotomy of mind and body, especially insofar as mind is the superior entity that aims to conquer body, is reinforced by Western rationalism and serves to further undermine the symbolic feminine³⁰ as well as female bodies.

According to Jewish mysticism scholar Elliot Wolfson's essay "Bifurcating the Androgyne and Engendering Sin: A Zoharic Reading of Genesis 1-3," the Zohar argues that the first human was a "male androgyne," which ultimately split as the female was extracted from the male and created as an independent being.³¹ Wolfson clarifies that this being, though dubbed

²⁹ Boyarin, "Gender," 132.

³⁰ The symbolic feminine refers to the collection of culturally and historically specific connotations that accompany references to "woman," as opposed to the physical components of a female sexed body. This definition can include anything from behavior to preferences to emotions to capabilities, as well as the notion of femininity itself, and varies depending upon the context.

³¹ Wolfson, "Bifurcating the Androgyne," 102.

“complete” in its male-and-femaleness, was not equal in the valuation of male and female. In fact, although Kabbalists emphasize that the androgynous *adam* was “equal in power” and “one in actuality,”

This does not necessarily measure up to the criterion of egalitarianism amenable to our contemporary sensibility; the equality and oneness may denote a unifying gender without sexual differentiation. Alternatively expressed, the androgynous nature of Adam—human and divine—is one in which there is neither male nor female as discrete constellations but only the male that comprises male and female. The equality of power and oneness of actuality defuse a sense of gender difference.³²

These androgynous qualities seem to indicate a dually-gendered being who precedes sexual differentiation along a binary. Because constructions of gender are frequently formed based on presumed sex and sexuality, I am curious what the kabbalists had in mind when they imagined an unsexed creature who has both “male and female” qualities. What is this essential “maleness” that exists without a body to situate it in, and be constructed off of? Joan Scott’s famous article, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” maintains that despite the changing definitions of gender throughout history and culture, the constant between the symbolic categories of male and female is a dynamic of power.³³ This assertion is clearly in agreement with the Zohar’s construction of male and female as unequally valued even within a single being.

Nonetheless, the transcendent nature of gender beyond the confines of the physical body within the kabbalistic tradition has been a focal point for modern discussions on transgender identities and the Jewish tradition. In an article responding to Prager’s publication in the Jewish Journal, Rabbi David Seidenberg makes a well-intended reference to 16th century kabbalist Yitzchak Luria (the Ari), when he states that “a male soul can be born into a female body,” though leaving out the second half of the sentence which is “...because of a sin, such as

³² Ibid., 104.

³³ Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis.”

homosexuality or something similar. This woman who has received the soul of a man will not be able to conceive and become pregnant.”³⁴To Seidenberg’s point, however, does the fact that this “male soul” is being born into a “female body”³⁵ approximate modern understandings of a transgender experience? If, additionally, it is God who is assigning the soul to this body, even if it is an act of punishment, it would seem to imply some degree of divine recognition and perhaps even endorsement of transgender identities. I hesitate to suggest this is what the kabbalists had in mind when they wrote of male and female “souls” outside of bodily characteristics, yet it is still thought-provoking that such variations to the conceptualization of gender exist deep within Jewish traditions. It is perhaps even reassuring for those who take radically different approaches to the issue of gender within Judaism, as rabbis have been “radical” towards gender throughout Jewish history.

In contrast to an unsexed creature, Jewish history scholar David Biale describes a single *adam* which *does* have sex differentiation, first introduced in Genesis Rabbah. Biale explains, “The rabbinic androgyne had *both sexes at once* rather than none at all: human beings were created with full sexual potential.”³⁶ Boyarin joins Biale in a discussion of this rabbinical dually-sexed androgyne, referencing its similarity to a Greek conceptualization of the first being as an androgynous pair of conjoined twins. However, the rabbis of the rabbinic period differ from the Greeks and Hellenized Jews such as Philo, as they argue that rather than presenting a “utopia of the neutral sex,” that “falls” into the imperfections of sexual difference, “In the rabbinical culture, the human race was thus marked from the very beginning by corporeality, difference,

³⁴ David Seidenberg, “Dennis Prager Has a Point; Halakhah in Transition: A Response to Dennis Prager’s Response on Transgender Jews,” *Jewish Journal*, December 10, 2015; R. Yitzchak Luria, Hayyim ben Joseph Vital, and Samuel ben Hayyim Vital, “Chapter Nine: Cross-Gender Soul Migration,” in *Sha’ar Hagilgulim*, trans. Yitzchak bar Chaim (Malibu, CA: Thirty Seven Books Pub., 2003).

³⁵ Although if this “female body” is barren, as the text suggests, it may be an indication that ze is intersex?

³⁶ David Biale, *Eros and the Jews: From Biblical Israel to Contemporary America* (New York, N.Y., United States: BasicBooks, 1992), 41.

and heterogeneity... sexuality belonged to the original (and not fallen) state of humanity.”³⁷ This initial being’s ultimate division into two beings sexed male and female is thus interpreted as a statement on a divine sanctioning of sexuality.

This “sex-positive” attitude towards the creation of humanity is echoed throughout a number of feminist writings as well, but is not without its problems.³⁸ First, reading sexuality from dimorphically sexed bodies implies that dimorphic sex characteristics exist for the purpose of heterosexual behavior. As radical feminist theorist Catharine MacKinnon argues, heterosexuality is not just a site of contact between men and women, but as beings differentiated in her eyes by the presence/absence of power, “heterosexual intercourse is the paradigm of male domination.”³⁹ She maintains that “the social relation between the sexes is organized so that men may dominate and women must submit and *this relation is sexual* — in fact, *is sex*.”⁴⁰ To root heterosexuality as inherent to humanity dooms women to an inferior sexual status, and ignores the ways those same characteristics can be used in non-heterosexual couplings or even in non-sexual contexts.

Adam as Two Beings

Shortly after the deity decides to create an *adam* in Hir image, Genesis 1:27 presents us with our second gendered phrase in the Hebrew Bible: *zachar u’nekeva* (זכר ונקבה), most often translated as “male and female.” It is with this phrase that the binary is created. As demonstrated by Prager’s writing, it has been used to exclude and de-legitimize identities, as well as in other

³⁷ Jean-Joseph Goux, “Luce Irigaray versus the Utopia of the Neutral Sex,” in *Engaging with Irigaray: Feminist Philosophy and Modern European Thought*, ed. Carolyn Burke, Naomi Schor, and Margaret Whitford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989); Boyarin, “Gender,” 129.

³⁸ For best example see Adler on p16

³⁹ Catharine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), 123; Amy Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power,” ed. Edward N. Zalta, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2016). Summarizing MacKinnon.

⁴⁰ MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*, 3.

arguments as evidence for inclusion and equal access to religious spaces. Some individuals have been empowered by the phrase in their identity as women, others have felt excluded by it as individuals identifying outside of the gender binary. To start off, I will discuss the etymological implications of the phrase.

Rachel Adler, a feminist theologian and rabbinics scholar, interprets the creation of *adam* as *zachar u'nekevah* to mean a “sexually diverse humankind.”⁴¹ She simplifies the Hebrew meanings of the words to that of the “doer” versus the “done to.” *Zachar* she translates as “creature with the male member,” referring to both the penis as well as the pun that works in both Hebrew and English of the word “remember.”⁴² The root of the word *zachar* is the letters *zayin-chaf-resh* (ז-כ-ר), which is the same root as the word meaning “to remember.” She connects the two with wordplay, arguing that “the only memory in patriarchies is male memory because the only members are male members... they are the recipients and transmitters of tradition, law, ritual, and story, the authorized interpreters of experience.”⁴³ The connection may seem far-fetched, but her inclusion of memory and historical power in a discussion of the phallus echoes Irigaray’s discussion of the “phallogocentric order,” or the “discursive and cultural order that privileges the masculine, represented by the phallus.”⁴⁴ Within Adler’s argument, the very category of male is inextricably linked to that particular anatomical feature and the system of power built up around it.

Nekeva, in contrast, she translates as “the pierced one,” or the one whose boundaries are penetrated, and as such she considers *nekeva* to be the antithesis of *zachar*.⁴⁵ Not only is there an

⁴¹ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 121.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Goux, “Luce Irigaray versus the Utopia of the Neutral Sex”; Allen, “Feminist Perspectives on Power.”

⁴⁵ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 121.

inequality in the penetration of boundaries, as “she and only she is permeable,” but by this translation *nekeva*, and thus, “woman,” is defined not by what one has, is, or does, but what is done to hir.⁴⁶ If maleness is defined through power and memory as rooted in the phallus, femaleness is the object which is acted upon through the instance of sexual intercourse: its very existence is defined in relation to the phallus.

Judith Plaskow discusses possible implications of these translations in her chapter “Dismantling the Gender Binary within Judaism: The Challenge of Transgender to Compulsory Heterosexuality,” in the book *Balancing on the Mechitza*. She defines *nekeva* similarly as “one with an orifice” which is not as necessarily dependent upon the action of another (penetration) for its definition as Adler’s.⁴⁷ Even still, she argues that this translation is evidence that penetrative intercourse is central to Judaism’s construction of sex/gender difference. In short, a literal translation of the Hebrew of *zachar u’nekeva* would seem to suggest 1) differentiation based on physical sex along a binary, and 2) heterosexual behavior between the two sexes.

Adler’s writing would seem to agree with these two implications, as she argues that it is sexual intimacy that is created in Genesis 1:27. She sees sexuality as marking humans “as both boundaried and boundary-transcending. It is at once personal and transpersonal, private and public. Within ourselves, all by ourselves, is the capacity for eroticism.”⁴⁸ She argues that establishing humans as divided by boundaries is not problematic, but merely a matter of distinguishing self against an Other, a theme that features prominently in Ladin’s work as well. In Adler’s view, just as sexual dimorphism creates boundaries between individuals, sexuality breaks down these boundaries. As she contends, “Overriding the physical and emotional

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Plaskow, “The Challenge of Transgender,” 192.

⁴⁸ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 118.

boundaries that keep human beings distinct from one another, [sexuality] urges us to open our portals, to extend ourselves, to create places of co-habitation where we and the other are interlinked.”⁴⁹ This sexuality is implicitly marked as both physical, as she references bodily functions such as “genitals raining their fluids,” as well as heterosexual, given her definitions of *zachar* and *nekeva* individually.

Meyers also supports the interpretation of the verse as sanctifying heterosexuality, yet does not see it as so linked with the erotic, and especially not with power or gender roles. She writes, “In fact, the parity of male and female in Genesis 1 probably was not meant for anything beyond the pairing of male and female for procreative purposes. The structure and purpose of Genesis 1 simply does not address the social world of humans.”⁵⁰ She understands this creation of reproductive heterosexuality in two different ways: through the prioritization of the romantic relationship and the obligation of a society to procreate.

First, through her analysis of the Genesis 2-3 narrative, Meyers reads the relationship between husband and wife as the paramount above all other relationships. This is telling because she sees the implied relationship between the two characters as going beyond sexual behavior, but rather two individuals who have engaged in the social contract of marriage (which is not mentioned in the text, and understood very differently in the Hebrew Bible than in our modern connotations of the word).⁵¹ She interprets this relationship as more important even than that of child and parent, citing Genesis 2:24: “therefore a man (*adam*) shall leave his father and mother,

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 86.

⁵¹ The only evidence to support the notion of marriage is the ambiguity of the word *isha*, which means both woman and wife. However, as the possessive word used in reference to the man is not *baalech* (your husband/master) but rather *eishech* (your man), it is more accurate to translate the words “woman” and “man” rather than “husband” and “wife.”

and shall cleave unto his woman (*isha*), and they shall be one flesh.” This verse is frequently understood as espousing that the individual’s spiritual fulfillment occurs when ze becomes one with a partner, or as Meyers sees it, getting married and engaging in sexual intercourse. This intercourse, to be sure, is for the purpose of having children and continuing the process of children leaving their parents and finding heterosexual partnerships, thus continuing the cycle. In holding that heterosexual marriage is the site of human spiritual fulfillment, Meyers inadvertently complicates her previous claim that the narrative implies equality between men and women. If compulsory heterosexuality were applied *equally* to both men and women, and the relationship between the two was non-hierarchical, perhaps it would technically be accurate, as non-heterosexual men and women would be equally excluded. However, as heterosexuality is so often a site of gender inequality as stated previously, the way such a conclusion plays out is confining straight women into a legally-bound unequal relationship, and excluding queer sexualities and non-binary genders from the possibility of spiritual fulfillment.

Meyers’ second interpretation of the phrase is taken in conjunction with the command to “be fruitful and multiply,” which she reads as promoting “conjugal bond[ing].”⁵² She sees this as a command extending beyond just that of individuals, but to society as a whole. One could claim that in emphasizing sexual reproduction as a component of a society, the injunction is not as incumbent upon the individual. This could potentially allow for heterosexuality to be but one of many ways in which people may navigate their sexual behavior, including queerness, asexuality, and non-binary genders.

⁵² Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 86.

Metaphorical Readings

There are also those who see the language of *adam* being created *zachar u'nekeva* not as a single ambiguously-sexed individual or two sexually dimorphic individuals, but rather as a more abstract description of God's intention for humanity. Given the heterosexual and hierarchical implications of the words' etymology, I see this as the interpretation approach with the most egalitarian potential. That being said, the interpretations below are not necessarily without their problems as well.

In his final rebuttal of Prager's article, David Seidenberg concludes that "each one of us is more than just male or female, each one of us is male *and* female, *zachar un'keivah*. We know that for many reasons, one being that the Torah says so."⁵³ This comes after his argument that the Torah does not affirm a gender binary, claiming that rabbinic law "affirms seven – seven! – genders," which account for seven different combinations of primary and secondary sex characteristics within the Mishnah.⁵⁴ He goes on to discuss kabbalistic approaches to gender in which male and female characteristics can exist simultaneously within a single person.⁵⁵ He also criticizes "transgender identity as we are constructing it today" for not "undo[ing] the binary of gender at all," and proposes a solution: "If we had more than two genders, then it would be easy to affirm male-born-female and female-born-male, alongside male-born-male and female-born-female, as real genders in and of themselves." Despite his chutzpah in criticizing and then "solving" trans discourse as a cisgender male, and his adherence to sexual dimorphism despite

⁵³ Seidenberg, "Dennis Prager Has a Point; Halakhah in Transition: A Response to Dennis Prager's Response on Transgender Jews."

⁵⁴ Ibid. His use of the word "gender" in this context should be understood as my definition of "sex" rather than "gender."

⁵⁵ I will return to this on page 29. Unfortunately, according to Wolfson's reading of the Zohar, this male-and-female within a single being does not ultimately create much potential for an end to gender hierarchy, as discussed when a single being possesses both male and female "essences"; it tends to be the male that is prioritized and the female that is viewed as the counterpart Other, providing balance.

supposed knowledge of intersex bodies, he makes important points of the power that blurring the categories of “male” and “female” within an individual and even deviating from them entirely can have on the ultimate dissolution of the gender binary. Through his use of the phrase *zachar u'nekeva* in his conclusion, he clearly believes that a multiplicity of gender identities is possible within the text of Genesis 1:27.

Echoing the sentiment but providing more specific textual evidence, Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari, a transmasculine Reform rabbi who helps manage the website Transtorah.org, focuses on the *vav* that connects *zachar u'nekeva*, the “*u*” that functions as the word “and.” Beyond the simple conjunction which connects two separate items, Fornari writes, “I translate ‘male and female’ as a merism, meaning stating two extremes that encompass the whole, to read ‘male *through* female (as in people of all genders)’ as in ‘*yomam va'laila* - day and night (meaning all of time)’ and *shamayim v'aretz* – heave [sic] and earth (meaning all the world).”⁵⁶ Such a reading suggests a spectrum of genders (or sexes) that were created with the first humans, rather than two distinct sexes.

Reform Rabbi Larry Bach has a similar interpretation, comparing *zachar u'nekeva* to the English phrase “flesh and blood.”⁵⁷ The phrase connotes a whole, living person, rather than simply skin/muscle and the contents of one’s blood vessels. This suggestion offers a potentially more inclusive range for gender even than Lev Fornari’s, as “flesh and blood” includes elements that are not even stated, such as bones and organs, etc. For *zachar u'nekeva* to function in the same way as “flesh and blood” means not only those with a penis and “an orifice” who engage in heterosexual behavior but also any other combination of the ranges of sex, gender and sexuality.

⁵⁶ Rabbi Ari Lev Fornari, “Honors Thesis,” November 2016. (emphasis added)

⁵⁷ Rabbi Larry Bach, Fall 2015. Conversation.

I see this interpretation in particular to have the most potential for a reading of Gen 1:27 which is inclusive of all bodies, gender identities, and sexual orientations.

Lev Fornari does identify the challenges with such a reading, however, as the other merisms found in the Torah pronounce the *vav* with a strong “v” sound, rather than the “u” in *zachar u’nekeva*. Nonetheless, he concludes that this is not enough to dismiss his interpretation, as “this is all Masoretic, so there is no reason to think that the original author didnt [sic] intend it to be pronounced *va’nekavah*...”⁵⁸ Otherwise stated, such an interpretation goes against the conventions of pronunciation for merisms in Hebrew, however the conventions themselves are accepted as uncertain given that the original placement of vowels is lost.

Ladin is also undeterred by the physical connotations of the words. She argues that *zachar u’nekeva* signifies the creation of humanity as a sexually dimorphic species, whose bodies *tend* to display sex characteristics that fall into one of two categories, while also acknowledging the vast range of ways those characteristics can manifest and deviate in intersex and trans bodies. And while the division of a diverse range of bodies into two categories is not ideal, “As far as God is concerned – and God’s perspective is the only one the text offers – differences in physical *sex* here have none of the significance that mark the presence of binary *gender*: the assignment of different roles, characteristics, feelings, desires, earning capacity, and authority, based on maleness and femaleness.”⁵⁹ The implications of gender along a binary, to Ladin, are far more destructive than the oversimplification of sex characteristics along a binary. However, she does admit that seeing sex along a binary sets the foundation for gender to follow, as most constructions of gender tie closely to presumptions about bodily difference. She

⁵⁸ Lev Fornari, “Trans Torah Query.”

⁵⁹ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 8. (Emphasis added)

summarizes, “Binaries aren't accurate, but they are sexy. In fact, their inaccuracy is what makes them so sexy. They not only offer concise, clear terms for organizing overwhelmingly complex phenomena. They also promiscuously associate with other binaries that extend their resonance and meaning.”⁶⁰ Her wordplay around the appeal of binaries is revealing, as binaries also aid in the categorization of bodies/presentations that inform many individuals’ evaluation of candidacy for a sexual partner, which are complicated when one is attracted to an individual that passes as a gender that does not correspond to their sex.

Such situations have prompted heated debates in the lesbian community in particular, which maintains attraction solely to “women” yet is now having to clarify whether that is the *gender* “woman” or the *sex* “woman.” If they conflate the two, they run the risk of falling into the trap that they criticize the patriarchy of doing: reducing womanhood to physical sex characteristics. On the other hand, if they root attraction in only sex, they cannot have the distinctions of “femme” or “butch” or other gender presentations that inform sexual preferences. The binaries at hand may simplify many interactions as one subconsciously evaluates candidacy for sexual attraction, however their inaccuracy ultimately surfaces and reveals the complexity of sexuality as it relates to sex and gender.

The Image of God

The final focal point of the Genesis 1:26-27 text is around the image of God. Many scholars have included this in their analysis of gender in the text, as the connection between the divine image and the “male and female” first human(s) has implications beyond just establishing limiting archetypes, but of describing God Himself. By extension, engaging with and “solving”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 10–11.

what “male and female” means can give one a glimpse into God’s very nature. As Ladin suggests, “despite the unbridgeable difference between the disembodied Creator of the Universe and male- and female-bodied human beings, we can glimpse in humanity something of God.”⁶¹ The task becomes understanding not only what “male and female” means for humans, but how it translates into an incorporeal divine being.

Phyllis Tribble set the stage for renewed attention to this topic in her influential 1978 book, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*.⁶² Her methodological approach is that of rhetorical criticism, a subset of literary criticism, whereby the primary clue to interpretation is the text itself. She uses the text exclusively in an investigation of discernable truths about the first humans, and ultimately, the divine image. Her methodology highlights the textual patterns in the narrative of the six days of creation, and uses deviations from those patterns as a way of marking an element as noteworthy. The creation of humanity, she argues, is unique from all of the other acts of creation God performs in Genesis. It is sandwiched between two verses of direct discourse (1:26 and 1:28), in which God’s words themselves are part of the act of creating, whereas 1:27 is *narrated* discourse, describing the actions of God in the third person. After the “divine deliberation” in 1:26, God creates humanity “in the image of God,” the only beings to be created as such. The logical next question for Tribble becomes, then, what is the image of God?

She uses the textual clues of what is present and absent in the acts of creation to narrow down potential characteristics for the image of God. In eliminating commonalities with animals, who were not described in the text as created in the image of God, she is able to exclude all but that which is uniquely human. She stresses that humans are the only creatures commanded to

⁶¹ Ibid., 26.

⁶² Tribble, “Clues in a Text.”

have dominion over all the earth, and the only creations to which God speaks directly in the first person.⁶³ Additionally, humans are the only living creations given sex (her interpretation of the words “*zachar u’nekeva*”) yet they are not the only creatures to be commanded to “be fruitful and multiply.” For this reason Tribble argues that *zachar u’nekeva* does not reflect an inherent association of “male and female” with reproduction, but with sexed bodies which stand as a metaphor for something more abstract in the divine.

Tribble then moves on from examining the text in the context of the creation story and focuses acutely on the structure, grammar, and meaning in Genesis 1:27 itself. She breaks down the verse into a poem of three lines, with four (Hebrew) words each:

And God created humankind in his image;

***In the image of God** created he him*

***Male and female** created he them.*⁶⁴

Through examining parallel structure, she notes that “male and female” correspond structurally to “the image of God.” This parallelism creates a metaphor, which as she explains requires a vehicle (the better known element) and a tenor (the underlying/overarching subject, the lesser known element). In this case, male and female are known, and the image of God is the unknown. The comparison between the two creates something new, as a metaphor results from an “interaction between vehicle and tenor.”⁶⁵

As to the nature of maleness and femaleness, Tribble argues that “male and female are not opposite but rather harmonious sexes,” “unity embraces sexual differentiation; it does not impose

⁶³ While it is true that God does not refer to Himself in the first person prior to 1:29, He does speak directly to both humans (1:28) and the land animals (1:22) with commands for both to “be fruitful and multiply.”

⁶⁴ Tribble, “Clues in a Text,” 12. Emphasis added.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

sexual identicalness.”⁶⁶ Tribble notes that there is a marked absence of sexual stereotypes or the notion of “feminine” and “masculine” in the first description of the two sexes, but rather mutually shared commands without dominion over the other. These beings, in her view, are “not delineated by sexual relationships, roles, characteristics, attitudes, or emotions.”⁶⁷ The fact that they are created together, in the beginning, emphasizes equality between the two, and furthermore the power that they share over creation in God’s command to “let them have dominion.” The responsibility of dominion and procreation fall equally on both beings’ shoulders.

What Tribble believes this tells us about God is interesting, and probably the biggest logical hurdle of the piece. If, as she previously outlined, the “male and female” aspect of humanity is the most explicit link to the “image of God,” then one can apply her discerned qualities of maleness/femaleness as 1) different-but-equal and 2) dominating over the earth, as glimpses into the “integrity, pluralism, dominion, and freedom of the image of God.”⁶⁸ In other words, she jumps from reading *zachar u’nekeva* in humans as equal, binary sexed, and ruling over animals and arguing that it is the singular characteristic in the text connected to the image of God, to concluding that “God is neither male nor female, nor a combination of the two... [male and female’s] freedom and uniqueness... uphold[s] the transcendence of the deity.”⁶⁹ If the sole means of glimpsing the deity’s image is part of “male and female,” then to say that God is not even a combination of the two would seem to undermine her point. Furthermore, if difference along a binary is the meaning of “male and female,” would that not seem to suggest that God is not actually one, but two distinct entities? Such a possibility is unthinkable within monotheistic

⁶⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 20.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

Jewish theology. Perhaps if she borrowed theories from Lev Fornari or Bach on the phrase as a merism, her argument could hold more water, as her claim for the plurality of God's many manifestations could be more strongly evidenced in a diverse range of human bodies as the key to glimpsing the divine.

Rachel Adler responds to Tribble's argument in her book *Engendering Judaism*, adding points that both bolster and deviate from Tribble's argument.⁷⁰ She also sees great significance in the "image of God," pointing out that it is mentioned four times in the two verses of Genesis 1:26-27. She starts with an analysis of 1:26, which uses the plural first person possessive of the words *tselem* (image, צֶלֶם) and *dmut* (likeness, דְּמוּת) to describe God's intentions for creating *adam*. She distinguishes the subtleties in variation between the two: "*Tzelem*, in its primary sense, means a physical representation, often a statue or an idol. *D'mut*, from the root DMH [-ג-ד-ה], to resemble, is a more generalized word for similitude... leaving the nature of *adam*'s likeness to God delicately poised between the substantial and the insubstantial."⁷¹ In the next verse, *tselem* is repeated and *dmut* is left out, as "likeness to God is realized in the flesh."⁷²

In the next verse, the God's intentions transform into actions, and another detail is added: male and female. Adler understands the "creation of sexual difference [as a climax to] verses wholly devoted to establishing human similarity to God..." and adds that she wants "to turn Tribble's argument upside down and argue that in Genesis 1 human sexuality is itself a metaphor for some element of the divine nature."⁷³ Her jump from sex to sexuality is a bold one, problematic both in its scant evidence in the text and her essentialization of human nature. She

⁷⁰ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 118.

attempts to support her jump from physical sex to sexuality (a distinction much more marked for me than I think for her) through highlighting that in 1:26-27 both God and *adam* are referred to with singular and plural language. She concludes that since “sexuality [is] the most primary way in which humankind is at once many and one... [it must be] a metaphor for the infinitude and unity of God.”⁷⁴

Adler goes on to clarify the two main components of sexuality that she identifies in the first humans: boundaries and power. As discussed previously, Adler sees sexuality as a place where boundaries are simultaneously penetrated and preserved, and part of an essential human “capacity to create intersubjective space, which we and God share, is what makes covenant possible.”⁷⁵ Again, this connection is troubling, as 1) she links sexuality to what it means to be human, leaving no room for asexual people’s existence, 2) her basis for interpreting sexuality is through a male-sexed body and a female-sexed body, and finally 3) her imagery of penetration, which reveals a very heteronormative understanding.

Adler finds no inherent problem with boundaries to distinguish sex and gender as categories, fitting the label coined by Ladin of a “Gender Binary Traditionalist,” or those who view the gender binary as an “immutable, built-in, God-given feature of humanity.”⁷⁶ Similarly, she does not view power as inherently bad either. The power bestowed upon the first humans is to master the natural world, though she clarifies, “mastery in Genesis 1 cannot mean the right to tyrannize over other creatures,” as they are only permitted to eat seed-bearing grasses and fruit-

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁷⁶ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 26. This is a category into which most of the early feminist hermeneutics tend to fall, as mainstream feminism had not yet fully embraced the idea that sex is not a binary. Melanie Blackless, Anne Fausto-Sterling et al’s famous article proving the huge range of sex variety in human bodies only came out in 2000, and it has still been a slow adjustment for many to shed the idea of binary gender as something that is inherent.

bearing trees at the time of this command, not meat.⁷⁷ The problem arises when, as power creates space for agency and choice, “instead of determining what power we do have or could acquire together with others, instead of organizing to maximize our power and share it more broadly, we vie with one another in a kind of moral poor-mouthing, as if denying our power relieved us of the obligation of sharing it and exercising it responsibly... The injunction to master the earth, then, carries with it the potential for sin, the possibility of abusing power.”⁷⁸ If power is indeed a reflection of the divine image as Adler says, and the power exhibited by God in Genesis 1 is creation, perhaps a stronger argument for Adler would be power as creation: not just procreation, as is commanded in 1:22 and 1:28, but also to be creative, collaborative, and sustainable in the cultivation of the earth. This might be a promising field for an ecofeminist approach to the text.

Using the framework of later commentary, French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and Kabbalah scholar Elliot Wolfson both interpret the “image of God” to have much less egalitarian potential. Levinas poses the question, “Does the image of God mean from the outset the simultaneity of the male and the female?”⁷⁹ He grounds his answer in the interpretation of Rav. Abbahu in Tractate Berachot, 61a:

Tractate Berachot:

It is written “Male and female created He them,” and it is written, “For in the image of God made He man.” How is this? At first He planned to create two, but in the end only one was created.⁸⁰

Levinas’ interpretation:

He created less well than is original idea. He would then--if I may venture to say so--have willed beyond his own image. He wanted two beings. In fact, he wanted that from the beginning there should be equality in the creature, no woman issuing from man, no woman who came after man. From the beginning he wanted two separate and equal

⁷⁷ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 119.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁹ Levinas, “And God Created Woman,” 173.

⁸⁰ “Berachot 61a,” in *Berachot*, Talmud Bavli (Sefaria, 2015).

beings. But that was impossible; this initial independence of two equal beings would no doubt have meant war. It had to be done not strictly according to justice, which would demand two separate beings. To create a world, he had to subordinate them one to the other.⁸¹

This analysis implies that God's image is male, for creating two beings, He was "willing *beyond* his own image," whereby the female is that which is "beyond" the image of God. As such, only one creature was created, the *adam* that we see starting in Chapter 2. Additionally, Levinas' reading implies that God would have preferred for there to be gender equality, but that it was impractical, that hierarchy is a defining component of sex/gender difference. This second conclusion is oddly in line with those who would say that the presence of a binary precludes the possibility of equality, as such a binary is inherently hierarchical. It is troubling that the deity's image is read as the unmarked male neutral, though not entirely unexpected given Levinas' apparent distaste for feminism.⁸²

Wolfson's discussion of the Zohar reveals a wildly different approach to the "image of God," as kabbalistic thought emphasizes the ten *sefirot* (divine emanations) as body parts of the divine macroanthropos, which he explains:

The limbs are not merely passive surfaces upon which the *sefirotic* potencies are imprinted, but they are themselves textured surfaces by which the human agent--embodied ideally in the body politic of Israel--is conjoined to and participates in the hidden divine reality. The physical image, therefore, is the means of access to the transcendence that exceeds the very physicality of that image. The sign, like the icon, is an amalgamation of presence and absence, insofar as it makes the invisible visible within the confines of the imagination and thereby enacts the presence of what must remain absent in order to be present.⁸³

As such, the first human is not only a "microcosm of the macroanthropos," but the divine Anthropos itself is "specularized through the prism of sexual difference, a central doctrine that

⁸¹ Levinas, "And God Created Woman," 173.

⁸² "What is challenged here is the revolution which thinks it has achieved the ultimate by destroying the family so as to liberate imprisoned sexuality." This seems to me to be a clear jab at feminism. *Ibid.*, 170.

⁸³ Wolfson, "Bifurcating the Androgyne," 90.

impacted both the theosophic understanding of the sefirotic emanations promulgated by the kabbalists and their understanding of the texture of the ecstatic experience of the divine.”⁸⁴ Thus, according to Wolfson’s interpretation, sexual differentiation along a binary is not only inherent to being human, it is also inherent *within the divine*.

Both Wolfson and Seidenberg reference the Zohar 1:55b, which emphasizes the sex/gender duality of the divine through interpreting *halachah*, though both thinkers present differing conclusions. According to the Zohar:

...any image in which there is not found male and female is not a supernal image as is appropriate... any place where male and female are not found as one, the blessed holy One does not place his dwelling here, and blessings are not found except in a place where male and female are found... even the name Adam is not invoked except when male and female are one.⁸⁵

Seidenberg looks positively upon this verse as evidence for his claim that “if we are to imagine God, we should not imagine God as only male or only female, because God’s image is necessarily both male and female (and everything in between and beyond).”⁸⁶ Wolfson, alternatively, sees it as a strict prescription of human existence and, by extension, the conceptualization of the divine, along the sex/gender binaries which define male and female as immutable opposites that exist only to provide balance for each other, with the identification of Self rooted in that of the male.

Wolfson views the eventual division from two spiritually-united physical sexes into separate sexed bodies as a “fall” of sorts. But rather than occurring in Genesis 2:22 when *isha* is created, “The initial enfleshment of Adam was that of the glorious or luminous body, which was

⁸⁴ Ibid., 95.

⁸⁵ “Zohar 1:55b,” in *Zohar* (Sefaria, 2015).

⁸⁶ Seidenberg, “Dennis Prager Has a Point; Halakhah in Transition: A Response to Dennis Prager’s Response on Transgender Jews.”

changed, as a consequence of the sin of eating of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, into the moral body made of corruptible skin.”⁸⁷ He discusses interpretations that argue that the sexual union of men and women is the only way to escape this inferior, single-sexed body and reunite with its counterpart to once again be in the image of God. Interestingly, this conclusion of heterosexuality as the image of God resonates with that of Adler, however she would not view one’s existence within a single-sexed body as a punishment as a result of sin. Wolfson ultimately concludes that such a pairing is not enough to restore the equality once intended for the two sexes, clarifying:

Those who focus on the heterosexual pairing as the sign of redemption are, in my judgment, articulating what is appropriate for the first stage, which is the mending of the rupture of the male and the female. Beyond that stage, however, there is a second stage, one in which the division within the divine is surmounted in the place where opposites are indistinguishable.⁸⁸

This echoes a recurring theme in the texts that binary, especially a binary that is rooted in sex difference, cannot create space for true equality so long as the categories are fixed and unequally valued.

One of the most recent and unconventional claims for interpreting the deity as dually sexed/gendered comes from Mark Sameth, a New York rabbi who posted an op-ed in the *New York Times* entitled, “Is God Transgender?” which was heavily criticized by many scholars and theologians for ignoring historical evidence.⁸⁹ In a well-intended effort to include transgender identities within Jewish tradition, he argues that “In the ancient world, well-expressed gender fluidity was the mark of a civilized person. Such a person was considered more ‘godlike.’ In Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, the gods were thought of as gender-fluid, and human beings

⁸⁷ Wolfson, “Bifurcating the Androgyne,” 93.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁹ Mark Sameth, “Is God Transgender?,” *The New York Times*, August 13, 2016, New York edition, sec. Opinion.

were considered reflections of the gods.”⁹⁰ It should be noted that both of these assertions have been deemed “an inaccurate reconstruction of ancient Near Eastern history.”⁹¹ Sameth continues to the main point of his argument and the focus of his upcoming book:

The Israelites took the transgender trope from their surrounding cultures and wove it into their own sacred scripture. The four-Hebrew-letter name of God, which scholars refer to as the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, was probably not pronounced ‘Jehovah’ or ‘Yahweh,’ as some have guessed. The Israelite priests would have read the letters in reverse as Hu/Hi — in other words, the hidden name of God was Hebrew for ‘He/She.’ Counter to everything we grew up believing, the God of Israel — the God of the three monotheistic, Abrahamic religions to which fully half the people on the planet today belong — was understood by its earliest worshipers to be a dual-gendered deity.⁹²

Among the article’s many critics, queer Jewish scholars Carolyn Klaasen and Jenna Stover-Kemp condemn his article as ultimately harmful to the cause of LGBTQ inclusion in Jewish tradition:

If we really want to fight for trans* inclusion in our religious communities, we have to do it in a way that does justice to the texts and methods we have inherited. Otherwise, if our efforts are based on bad scholarship, they are easily dismissed and thus fail to further the efforts toward trans* inclusion... As biblical scholars, we know there are ways to use the Bible for this project, and as queer Jews who are in trans* inclusive communities, we know there are amazing thinkers doing it well.⁹³

The two short verses of Genesis 1:26-27 have sent thinkers in many different directions, each with their own implications for sex and gender inclusion. One must not ignore the troubling etymologies of *zachar u’nekeva*, whose roots imply a penis and a penetrable orifice, however there are a number of ways around a conclusion which reinforces gender hierarchy and a heterosexual sex binary. For one, if the text is read as merely a story of the first instance of

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Carolyn Klaasen and Jenna Stover-Kemp, “Bad Scholarship A Poor Solution to Anti-Trans Politics: A Response to the New York Times’ ‘Is God Transgender?,” *Religion Dispatches*, September 6, 2016.

⁹² Sameth, “Is God Transgender?”

⁹³ Klaasen and Stover-Kemp, “Bad Scholarship A Poor Solution to Anti-Trans Politics.”

humanity, but also allowing for humanity to evolve over the course of the text, the presence of such sex-essentialist roots may not be as damaging as long as trans and queer people are included in what is “naturally human” in today’s world. However, for many, the story tends to be read as God’s intention for how humanity essentially is and/or should be, and thus the sex and gender binaries are quite harmful. Adler suggests that the presence of sex characteristics could be secondary to the implication of sexuality as the key to what is essentially human, though the etymology suggests an agency applied to *zachar* that is absent in *nekeva*. Such an imbalance sets the stage for patriarchy to impose itself on hierarchical sexual roles, and additionally excluding non-heterosexual or non-binary-sexed-or-gendered individuals. Alternatively, one could read *adam* when used in the singular as a single unit of the broader category of humanity, who regardless of sex or gender is created both capable of penetrating and penetrable, of being sexually dominant and sexually submissive. Or one could take the “spectrum” approach discussed by Lev Fornari and Bach, reading the phrase as a merism which implies much more than a penis and penetrable orifice but rather everything in between and beyond, making room for a full range of sex characteristics and sexual behavior. Thus I conclude that the text offers enough possibilities through various avenues of thought to make the assertion that Chapter 1 of Genesis can be inclusive to women and queer, trans, and intersex people. While speculating on the nature of the divine is not the intention of this thesis, I argue that given the variety of routes to inclusive interpretations, an inclusive image of God is possible so long as *zachar u’nekeva* is the tenor to understanding the image of God.

Genesis 2

As the first creation narrative comes to a close in the first three verses of Genesis 2 with God resting and making the Sabbath holy, the second begins with a proclamation that the following text will detail “the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven,” (Gen. 2:4). Already this is a difference from the previous narrative, which describes that the first humans were created on the sixth day along with the animals, but in the second narrative they are created on the same day as the heavens and the earth (the first day in the previous narrative). Additionally, we see a change in the language used to refer to God, from Elohim to Adonai Elohim, which biblical scholars identify as a shift in source authorship from the P source to the much older J source.⁹⁴

There are many ways of approaching the shift in narratives and contradictions presented. More traditional sources, such as the Talmud and the Zohar, read the text literally and as such adjust their interpretations around the impossibility of inconsistency. Since Chapter 2 begins with an unambiguously singular *adam*, the Talmudic rabbis could not read Chapter 1 as the creation of two beings, despite the plural *otam* (them) at the end of 1:27. As previously enumerated, they instead saw the first human as a single being that was dually sexed male and female, and that interpretation logically follows into Chapter 2. The creation of *isha*, consequently, they see as the splitting of the original androgyne into two distinct sexes. Though borrowing heavily from the Talmudic texts, the Zohar offers a slightly different interpretation. It argues that, rather than one continuous narrative from Genesis 1 to 2, the narratives are two versions of the same event. As Wolfson discusses, the Zohar views the second creation narrative

⁹⁴ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 122. Adonai is not the actual word written in the text, but rather the letters *yod heh vav heh*, which spell out the unpronounceable name of God, often referred to as the tetragrammaton.

as a midrash of the first, whereby the event described in the short verses of 1:26-27 is expanded upon with the details provided by second narrative. In this single event described twice, a dually sexed (yet singly gendered) *adam* splits into two beings, though the female is understood as a secondary appendage which broke off of the main being rather than a whole divided evenly in two.

Other approaches to the inconsistencies involve a less literal reading of the text. Hebrew Bible scholar Robert Alter suggests that the first narrative is a “theological” telling of the creation, whereas the second is a “realistic” portrayal.⁹⁵ He claims that the biblical authors believed that God had created men and women equal, but in an effort to reckon with the sexist reality around them, they included the second narrative as an alternative explanation. This position is echoed by Rachel Adler, who explains that the second narrative is not the creation of humanity, as is described in the first, but the creation of the male perspective, or the lens by which men are trained to see the world as resources to be exploited and subjugated. Semiotics scholar Mieke Bal disagrees with Alter’s claim, providing her own analysis of each component of the second narrative that is typically viewed as “sexist” or a challenge to gender equality.⁹⁶ Similar to the kabbalists, Bal sees the second narrative as “a specified narration of what events are included in the idea that ‘God created them male and female.’”⁹⁷ Using source criticism, she contends that the authors of the (newer) first narrative were “not presenting a theological counterstatement to the second and older one,” rather “they were good readers and wrote a piece that retrospectively completed the imaginary representation of this particular conception of

⁹⁵ Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 142–43.

⁹⁶ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 118–19.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 119.

creation through differentiation.”⁹⁸ Similar to Wolfson, Bal views the second narrative as a more detailed account of the first narrative.

Ladin also compares the two narratives, though she is less concerned with narrative inconsistencies, and more with the inconsistencies in the implications for humans within a gendered world. She discerns her own truths from the two narratives, explaining, “Genesis 1:27 suggests [that] gender is absolute; we aren’t treated as human until we take our places in the binary... But as God and Adam discover in Genesis 2, gender is not only an image in which we are created; it is an image in which we create, and recreate, ourselves, through our relationships to one another.”⁹⁹ She concludes that “both accounts in Genesis are true; or rather, truth is what we get when we take both, contradictions and all, together. Gender is both a given of existence and a relationship driven process, an absolute template and a fluid mode of self-expression.”¹⁰⁰ Despite the contradicting events detailed in each narrative, Ladin views each as providing different takeaways that do not conflict.

In this section, I examine through each of the verses within the chapter that raise questions of gender hierarchy, and evaluate scholars’ exegeses for their ability to put maleness and femaleness on equal terms and to challenge the existence of those categories within a binary. I argue that in contrast to Chapter 1, which focuses on the dangers of *sex differentiation* along a binary, Chapter 2 establishes *gender* along a binary, which is quickly accompanied by gender roles and ultimately, as we see emerge in Chapter 3, gender hierarchy.

The Creation of Adam, Again

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 8.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

2:7 Then the LORD God formed [adam] of the dust of the [earth], and breathed into [hir] nostrils the breath of life; and [adam] became a living soul.	ז וַיִּצְרֶה יי אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם, עָפָר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה, וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו, נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים; וַיְהִי הָאָדָם, לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה.
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The second narrative begins with *adam*'s creation from the earth. Notably, the word *adam* shares the same root as the Hebrew word for earth, *adama* (אדמה), an observation that scholars have mused was the Bible's first pun.¹⁰¹ Adler adds that the root is "associated with redness," and is (possibly) linked to the word for blood, *dam*. She alludes to the creation of the earth in her description that "*adam* is the red-earth creature, a continent of flesh reticulated by rivers of blood."¹⁰²

Meyers is particularly compelled by this shared root, arguing that "The term *adam* tells us that the essence of human life is not its eventual classification into gendered categories but rather its organic connection to the earth... At the very outset, human existence is thus portrayed as inextricably related to that which makes life possible, arable land."¹⁰³ She argues that this relationship between humanity and the earth is no accident, that first and foremost the cultivation of food was an essential concern for the Ancient Israelites, who were mostly an agrarian society that relied on subsistence farming. The connection between human existence and agriculture would have been obvious to them, as it influenced every aspect of their lives, including, most relevant to this discussion, gender roles. Archaeological evidence of Ancient Israelite sites suggests rigid gender roles, whereby the men worked heavily in the fields to plant and harvest crops and then the women worked inside the home structure to prepare the various crops into a form that can be eaten.¹⁰⁴ As such, the very distinction of gender for the Ancient Israelites is

¹⁰¹ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 113; Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 81.

¹⁰² Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 117.

¹⁰³ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 82.

¹⁰⁴ The use of men and women here is assumed to refer to cisgender individuals whose sex conforms to biological binaries. Because of the scant physical evidence of this society and the bias of archeologists along a binarily-

determined by a dependence upon the earth for food, where gender roles are constructed along two categories of agricultural occupations. Adler takes a more critical attitude towards this correlation between the second narrative *adam* and the earth, arguing that from the “male perspective” that the chapter establishes, the earth is framed “as a collection of resources valuable insofar as man can use them.”¹⁰⁵

Levinas discusses the apparent “typo” in God’s creation of *adam* in Genesis 2:7, which is spelled with an extra letter *yod*, while its traditional spelling is used to describe the creation of animals (וייצר).¹⁰⁶ He draws off of the rabbis’ discussion of the spelling; perhaps one *yod* is the animalistic nature of humans, and the other is the sense of self and relation to God. Levinas seems to fixate in particular on an interpretation of the two *yods* as the first human having two faces, affirming that “The creation of the human being is extraordinary; to create a man was to create in one creature two. They were two in one.”¹⁰⁷ Interestingly, he clarifies that these two beings in one “do not refer to woman,” but rather a more innate duality of the self.¹⁰⁸

As mentioned in my previous section, Levinas situates his claim of the equality of male and female within a world in which men and women are not treated equally. Restated for convenience, he argues that “[God] created less well than his original idea... from the beginning he wanted two separate and equal beings. But that was impossible; this initial independence of two equal beings would no doubt have meant war. It had to be done not strictly according to justice... to create a world, he had to subordinate them one to the other.”¹⁰⁹ He sees this

sexed/gendered schema, we do not have evidence to discuss how individuals understood today as intersex or transgender would have fit into this society.

¹⁰⁵ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas, “And God Created Woman.”

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

subordination as evidenced in physical difference: “a sexual difference, and, hence, a certain preeminence of man, a woman coming later, and as woman, an appendage of the human... the very femininity of woman is in this initial ‘after the event.’”¹¹⁰ It is clear in his interpretation that women are created lesser than their male counterparts, rather than a human-made imposition of hierarchy, despite the idea of male and female being on equal terms in the eyes of God. Levinas’ penultimate paragraph ties together the entire piece:

You see: the feminine is in a fairly good position in this hierarchy of values... It is in second place. It is not woman who is thus slighted. It is the relation based on sexual differences which is subordinated to the interhuman relation—irreducible to the drives and complexes of the libido—to which woman rises as well as man. Maybe man precedes—by a few centuries—the woman in this elevation. From which a certain--provisional?--priority of man. Maybe the masculine is more directly linked to the universal, and maybe masculine civilization has prepared, above the sexual, a human order in which a woman enters, completely human.¹¹¹

Clearly, for Levinas, equality of the masculine and the feminine within the first being exists in name only; despite perhaps an initial divine preference for equality, the original human is quite clearly a masculine neutral out of a divine disdain for sexuality and thus, Levinas constructs femininity as a subordinate (hetero)sexual role. His argument that “woman is not slighted” in a non-sexual masculine neutral definition of humanity reveals an underlying presumption that sexuality is something that men can shed or abstain from, yet for women, being the object of sexual desire/action is a defining characteristic of what makes one a woman. His argument does not ostensibly consider the devastating impact of being trapped within a bodily role that is deemed secondary to humanity, from the exploitation of reproductive labor, to the denial of sexual autonomy, to the threat of (sexual, legal, physical, medical, verbal) violence for those who would resist or deviate from such roles.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 177.

Not every interpretation of the second narrative singular *adam* is as troubling for women and LGBTQ folks, however. Both Bal and Ladin offer interpretations of an ambiguously gendered second narrative *adam* which serves to empower women's and transfolks' existence. Bal takes a semiotic approach to the first humans whereby each step in the narrative adds something to the human creations not present until that point. She views the *isha* (woman) as not fully formed until Genesis 3:20 when *adam* names her *Chava*, or Eve. As such, the *adam* that is created out of earth in 2:7 is not a complete human but an "earth creature," with "no name, no sex, and no activity."¹¹² In her view, this is the story of its step-by-step creation into the eventual human categories of male and female.

Bal defends the singularity of *adam* with the use of the definite article *ha*, and she explains that *ze* is not fully formed, being little more than a clod of mud separated from the earth. She cites two examples as proof that *ha'adam* includes what would become both the *ish* (man) and the *isha*: the fact that God commanded *adam* not to eat from the tree of knowledge before the formation of the *isha*, and yet both understand the command to apply to them. Additionally, when God banishes *ha'adam* from the Garden of Eden, Eve goes too, though Bal admits that this could just be because at that point she is subservient to Adam and has to go with him. If, as Bal suggests, this first *adam* is not yet fully human and not yet sexed, it is difficult to discern any attributes of this unsexed character beyond God's ultimate decision that it needs a partner. As such we cannot judge whether it falls victim to the habit of "masculine neutrality" the way that other interpretations of the singular *adam* have.

It is Not Good to be Alone

¹¹² Bal, *Lethal Love*, 112.

2:18 *And the LORD God said: 'It is not good that the [adam] should be alone; I will make [hir] a help meet for [hir].'*

יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים, לֹא-טוֹב הָיְתָה הָאָדָם לְבֶדּוּ;
אֶעֱשֶׂה-לוֹ עֵזֶר, כְּנַגְדּוֹ.

Ladin’s discussion of the first humans is not concerned with the consistency challenges presented by the two creation narratives, rather she sees each as presenting alternative but complementary approaches to sex, gender, and sexuality. She sees the *adam* created in the first narrative as the creation of humanity, quite clearly two (or more) beings. However, the singularity of *adam* in the second narrative is central to her understanding of the truths it provides. Focusing on God’s concern that “it is not good for *ha’adam* to be alone,” (Gen 2:18) Ladin recalls the loneliness she experienced growing up knowing that she was trans and feeling like there was no one else like her. As she writes so candidly, “The Torah doesn’t speak of how it feels to be transgender, but it does speak to the longing to be known and loved that drove me to live so long as a man. Indeed, according to the second chapter of Genesis that is why gender was created: so human beings would not feel alone.”¹¹³ For much of her life, Ladin’s pretense of maleness was a means to feeling included and accepted in society, whereas to come out as a woman would be ostracizing and lead to loneliness, despite her being more true to herself.

Adler focuses on the latter half of the verse, taking a critical view of the phrase *ezer k’negdo* (עֵזֶר כְּנַגְדּוֹ), the Hebrew word used for “helper” or “a help meet for him,” in the context of her argument that Genesis 2 is the creation of the male perspective. She adds that the word *neged* (as in *k’negdo*) means not only “corresponding to,” but also “against,” and as such the phrase “actually carries dual senses of polarity and likeness.”¹¹⁴ Accordingly, she translates the phrase as “a helper who is his counter/part,” explaining that “instead of the tension of like and

¹¹³ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 13.

¹¹⁴ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 122.

other sustained in intersubjective relations, an unequal complementarity is established in which man is the subject and woman, his helper and reflection, is both counter to him and part of him.”¹¹⁵ Such a statement parallels the implications of her translation of *zachar u’nekeva*, whereby *zachar* is standalone yet *nekeva* is defined both in relation to and as distinct from *zachar*.

Meyers identifies *ezer k’negdo*’s shared root (ע-ז-ג) with the verb “to help,” and translates the phrase instead as “one who helps.” She points out that many people read help as a hierarchical relationship, part of a server/served dichotomy by which to be helped is a privilege and to help is a sign of inferiority. She instead reads “the prepositional phrase [as establishing] a nonhierarchical relationship between the two; it means ‘opposite,’ or ‘corresponding to,’ or ‘parallel with,’ or ‘on par with.’”¹¹⁶ She argues that a hierarchical understanding is additionally not supported by the root’s use in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, citing passages such as in Psalm 121:1-3, “help comes from the Lord.” She also references names such as Ezra and Azaria, which mean “God is helper” and “God has helped,” respectively. If the deity, who is clearly not understood as subservient to humans, is referred to as a helper, then use of the word to describe the *isha*’s relationship to *adam* clearly cannot in itself imply a hierarchical dynamic, or at least not one in which *adam* is superior. She concludes, “The relationship between the first two beings, the Woman and the Man (i.e. between any conjugal pair) is set forth in the phrase ‘suitable counterpart.’”¹¹⁷ For Meyers, this verse is emphasizing that heterosexual relationships are divinely ordained to be egalitarian.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 85.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 184–85.

Bal draws attention to the fact that it is God who determines that it is not good for *ha'adam* to be alone, concluding the *adam* itself cannot understand its own needs. She translates the verse as “I will make for it a companion corresponding to it,” rather than the “obviously sexist but common translation ‘a help fit for him.’”¹¹⁸ This is because, in her view, “the lack of sexual difference causes loneliness, but the being who lacks it cannot be aware of what it never had.”¹¹⁹ Her translation, she argues, is an improvement of the typical translation, which “misses the deep insight into the nature of sexuality that is worded in this text.”¹²⁰ She sees this sexuality as evidenced in the etymological contrast inherent within complementarity, explaining that it is the “tension between the *same* and the *different* that creates sexuality.”¹²¹ This argument relies on a clearly heteronormative viewpoint, rooting this sexuality-creating difference specifically in sex differentiation.¹²² This is also an interesting contrast with Ladin, as Bal sees a lack of difference as the source of loneliness, whereas in Ladin’s interpretation, as someone who was excluded from full participation in society because of perceived sexual difference, the potential sexual difference of the first humans is trivial compared to the need to have loving, accepting relations of kinship. In other words, Bal’s definition of sexuality is oppositional, whereas Ladin’s notion of relationships (sexual and otherwise) has kinship and similarity at its core.

The Creation of Isha

<p>2:21 And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the [adam], and [ze] slept; and [Ze] took one of [hir] ribs, and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof.</p> <p>22 And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from the [adam], made [Ze] [an isha], and brought her unto the [adam].</p>	<p>כא ויפל יי אלהים תרדמה על-הָאָדָם, ויִישָׁן; ויקח, אחת מצלעותיו, ויסגר בֶּשֶׂר, תחתיה. כב ויבן יי אלהים את-הצלע אִשָּׁר-לְקַח מִן- הָאָדָם, לְאִשָּׁה; ויבאהָ, אֶל-הָאָדָם.</p>
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¹¹⁸ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 115.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Clearly, she has not heard the playful stereotype that lesbians are often attracted to women who look just like themselves.

As the narrative continues, God takes action to solve *adam*'s loneliness by putting the creature to sleep and extracting a piece of his body which God then uses to construct a second being. The rabbis of Tractate *Berakhot* begin by discussing what the word here translated as "rib," *tsela* (צלע) could mean in the context of their interpretation of the primordial androgyne. Levinas in turn offers commentary on the implications of each of the parts of *adam* the *isha* was potentially created from: the tail, the rib, or the face. If the *tsela* is a face, "a face posits a perfect equality between the feminine and the masculine; he thinks that all relations that bind them are of equal dignity. The creation of man was the creation of two beings in one but of two beings equal in dignity: difference and sexual relations belong to the fundamental content of what is human."¹²³ Similar to the Hellenistic myth of the primal androgyne, Levinas interprets that the severed face insinuates a being which formed back to back, was split down the middle and will ultimately pursue a reunion with the missing half, in the form of sexual relations that occur face-to-face.

His interpretation of the rabbi who believes that *isha* was created from the tail is also at first one of equality: that man and woman themselves were created at the same time, and that woman also comes out of what is human. But for *isha* to have been created from a tail requires a separate act of creation, rather than a division of an existing duality (two faces), so her creation and thus the feminine is secondary in chronological order and value.¹²⁴ By extension, the relationship between man and woman itself, which again signifies sexual relations to Levinas, is also secondary: "Fundamental are the tasks that man accomplishes as a human being and that

¹²³ Levinas, "And God Created Woman," 169.

¹²⁴ The Talmudic rabbis and Levinas both offer lengthy explanations for what being created second means, but they are not immediately helpful with the search for women's and LGBT liberation within the text.

woman accomplishes as a human being. They have other things to do beside cooing, and, moreover, something else to do and more, than to limit themselves to the relations that are established because of the differences in sex.”¹²⁵ In other words, if *isha* came from *adam*'s tail, sex/gender difference along a binary is “part of what is human,” yet female as a sex/gender category is inferior, and (hetero)sexual behavior is not a defining element of humanity.

This seems to be the perspective that Levinas most agrees with, going on to criticize movements advocating “sexual liberation” and psychoanalytic theory which tends to see sex at the center of one’s internal conflicts. He concludes, “To acknowledge that the sexual relation itself is only incidental to the human is to locate the spiritual life of humanity in a concern for balancing an existence torn between nature and Law. To put it even more broadly: culture is not determined by libido.”¹²⁶ In this conclusion, Levinas would seem to stand in stark opposition to Adler in her reading of sexuality as *the* essential human characteristic. While I have problematized Adler’s interpretation for its heteronormative tendencies, I also am concerned by Levinas’ apparent disdain for sexuality, for precisely the reason that he illustrates, which is the inseparability of constructed womanhood and sexuality. Levinas frames sexuality as excluded from the realm of the ethical, as he sees sexuality as inherently reciprocal and thus never truly altruistic.

So what does one make of this, if it is heteronormative to read sexuality as inherent but reinforcing gender hierarchy to read it as secondary? I see the answer in the nuance of approach: for women and queer people, as sexually oppressed minorities whose identities are often essentialized and demonized for their sexuality, it is important that sexuality be considered *one*

¹²⁵ Levinas, “And God Created Woman,” 169.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

of many ways in which one can be human and in the divine image. However, such a consideration must emphasize that despite the prominent role it plays in the lives of some, sexuality as a concept and the many varieties in which it manifests are not consistent throughout every individual in their preferences, degree of desire, or behavior. Sexuality may be described as a “human experience” just as cramming for a test is a “college experience”: many students do it in different ways, with different frequencies (including not at all), yet no one would claim that one’s identity as a college student is dependent upon one’s study habits.

In his zoharic analysis of the same passage, Wolfson also discusses the way that the debates over which body parts are signified by *adam*’s *tsela* translate into kabbalistic notions of body parts and the ten *sefirot* (essences of the divine). He focuses specifically on “the fashioning of the side,” which “conveys that God adorned and beautified the female, ostensibly to make her an object worthy of the male gaze, a theme that bespeaks an androcentric viewpoint.”¹²⁷ He connects the severing of the side to the *Shechinah*, the only female *sefira*, which “becomes an independent potency when she is separated from *Tiferet*.”¹²⁸ This would seem to indicate that the division of male and female in Genesis 2:21-22 suggests a bifurcation of not only the human androgyne but also of the divine “macroanthropos.” Wolfson also argues that “the sawing apart of the androgyne is what brought about the gender polarity, the masculine symbolized as the front or the east and the feminine as the back or the west.”¹²⁹ This underscores the points made by Adler, Bal, and Meyers that the creative act in the second half of Genesis 2 sets male and female as opposite categories. Wolfson ultimately concludes that, “The kabbalistic exegesis, in my opinion, is based on presuming *one gender* (the male that is both male and female) with two

¹²⁷ Wolfson, “Bifurcating the Androgyne,” 99–100.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

sexuated manifestations (the female constructed from the male). The partition of the androgyne *gives rise to two sexes*, which establishes the very heterogeneity that is effaced in the reinstallation of the originary state.”¹³⁰ That is, the first being was of one gender outside of the male/female binary, yet which favored male over female, and possessed male and female sex characteristics, whose ultimate division gave rise to heterosexual desire.

Bal offers her own interpretation of what body part *tsela* should be understood as, explaining, “Some scholars think it means side. It could, then, be a euphemism, for ‘belly,’ as ‘feet’ often stands for ‘testicles.’ In that case, it could refer to the womb, an apparent reversal of sexual function that is not at all unthinkable in the case of this undifferentiated earth creature.”¹³¹ While the uterus is undeniably a component of the construction of the sex category “female,” it is troubling that it could be the part removed from *adam*. Unlike “uterus,” which is merely an organ that carries out a variety of functions, some of which are part of the incubation of a fertilized egg, the word “womb” tends to be used exclusively to refer to the reproductive process. Additionally, if it is the quintessential reproductive organ that is removed from *adam*, so too is the symbolic process of reproduction isolated from the male. As many feminists attempt to get away from the conflation of the female sex with its reproductive capabilities, it would seem that Bal has just reduced the first prototype to such a role, and additionally excluding “man” from reproduction.

Bal furthers her claims in her second suggestion of the meaning of *tsela*, which she argues is “not incompatible with the previous one”:

¹³⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹³¹ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 115.

Oosten and Moyer rightly connected this mytheme with the Sumeric myth of Enki in paradise.¹³² In this myth the Goddess Nin-ti is created from Enki's rib. *Ti* means rib as well as 'the making of life.' Although the pun gets lost in Hebrew, the association may have made sense: the 'mother of all living' who emerges in Gen. 3:30 is herself made from (a piece of) living material. Such a reversal of object and subject would be typical in mythological terms.¹³³

It is clear from this passage that she sees the *isha*'s creation out of the *adam*'s womb as more than just a component of the female sex, rather the *isha* is explicitly and exclusively associated with reproduction. Bal supports this in a reference to the *isha*'s eventual name *Chava* (Eve), which she has translated as "mother of all living."

Adler takes a different approach to this pair of verses. She emphasizes the differences in meaning of the verbs used to describe human creation, explaining, "Woman is not brought into being in a manner unlike that of all other creatures. She is not created (BRH, [א-ר-ב]) like *adam* in Genesis 1 nor formed (YTzR, [ר-צ-י]) like Adam and the animals in Genesis 2; instead she is constructed (BNH, [ה-נ-ב])."¹³⁴ Adler describes *isha* as "a construction designed to meet [adam's] specifications," as if she is a commercial product produced by God per *adam*'s custom order.¹³⁵ As her tone suggests, she joins many feminists in seeing the creation of *isha* in Genesis 2 as a divine ordination of patriarchy.¹³⁶

Bal also comments on the verb use, though in a much more positive light. She connects *v'yitser* (ר-צ-י) to its association with pottery, playing off of *adam* being made out of clay. Alternatively *v'yiven* (ה-נ-ב), "the verb used in 2:22 refers specifically to architecture and the

¹³²Jarich Oosten and David Moyer, "De mythische omkering: een analyse van de sociale code van de scheppingsmythen van Genesis 2–11," *Anthropologische verkenningen* 1 (1982): 80; S. N. Kramer, *Mythologies of the Ancient World* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), 102–3.

¹³³Bal, *Lethal Love*, 115.

¹³⁴Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 122.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Yiskah Rosenfeld, "You Take Lilith, I'll Take Eve," in *Yentl's Revenge*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (United States: Publishers Group West, 2001).

construction of buildings. The action is both more difficult and more sophisticated, and it requires more differentiated material. The difference would indicate a higher level of creation.”¹³⁷ She sees this action as not just the creation of *isha*, but also of *ish*. Bal reads *adam*’s sleep in which God removes his *tsela* this as “the death of the undifferentiated earth creature. It will emerge from it in differentiation.”¹³⁸ That is to say, God is taking Hir non-sexed and non-gendered mud creature and splitting it, engineering each half into separate and distinct beings, *ish* and *isha*. To suggest a metaphor, the creation of *adam* is the process of mechanically sculpting bricks out of clay, whereas the action in Gen. 2:22 is the construction of two different houses out of those bricks.

Ladin takes a completely different perspective towards this moment in the narrative. Drawing on ideas of the presence of both male and female within the Genesis 2 *adam*, she explains that “masculinity contains – indeed, is defined by – the femininity boys and men are taught not to express.”¹³⁹ As such, “all males internalize a femininity that, like Adam’s rib, can be brought out of our male identities and fashioned into new female selves. In this sense, I’m not approximating a femininity that isn’t mine; like my breasts’ ability to grow when exposed to estrogen, femininity has always been there, sleeping within me. Like Adam, I simply – simply! – had to cut myself open to give birth to the woman swaddled and smothered by my masculinity.”¹⁴⁰ In contrast to Bal’s implication that what is formed into the *isha* no longer remains in the *adam*, Ladin argues that the truth to be gleaned from *isha*’s formation out of *adam* is that inherent in maleness is also femaleness. While superficially mirroring the “masculine androgyny” of kabbalah, Ladin maintains that such an internal duality remains intact following

¹³⁷ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 115.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ladin, “Torah In Transition,” 9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

the creation of Eve, rather than a “fall” into bodies of a single sex that no longer reflects the divine androgyne.¹⁴¹

Such an interpretation is promising for gender fluidity and the erosion of binary, however it raises questions as to the role of the feminine. Certainly there is textual evidence to say there is a presence of femaleness in the male, but is there similar evidence for maleness in the female, without a complementary narrative instance of “male” being created out of “female”? Could this fall victim to the same conclusion that Levinas ultimately reaches, that male and female are equal as long as they are in the male, but femininity by itself and as it manifests in a woman is inferior? It is certainly important to consider Ladin’s approach, which is much more metaphorical and framed around the truths of the text that resonate with her personal experience, without her presumption that such truths are universally applicable. However, for such a promising assertion as masculinity and femininity being present within all men to hold water in a theoretical egalitarian reconstruction of the text, such implications must be explored.

Differentiation

<p>23 And the [adam] said: ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called [isha], because she was taken out of [ish].’</p>	<p>כַּג וַיֵּאמֶר, הָאָדָם, זֹאת הַפֶּעַם עָצָם מֵעַצְמִי, וּבָשָׂר מִבָּשָׂרִי; לְזֹאת יִקְרָא אִשָּׁה, כִּי מֵאִישׁ לְקָחָהּ-זֹאת.</p>
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In the verse immediately after *isha* is created, God brings her to *adam*. *Adam*, now considered to be definitively a singular male human in most interpretations, immediately responds with his first documented speech in the text.¹⁴² In the first half of his speech, he acknowledges the similarities between himself and the new being, before using the passive future

¹⁴¹ Wolfson, “Bifurcating the Androgyne,” 103.

¹⁴² Following this point in the narrative, I will use she/her/hers pronouns to refer to the *isha*, and he/him/his pronouns to refer to the *adam*.

tense to predict that she shall be called *isha* (woman) in relation to the word he assigns to himself, *ish* (man).

As Jewish literature scholar Yiskah Rosenfeld highlights in her essay, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve,” one of the defining features of the second chapter *adam* is his ability to name things, a privilege *isha* is not granted until her interaction with the serpent.¹⁴³ Rosenfeld sees the phrase *zot ha-pa’am* (זאת הפעם), “this time,” at the beginning of the verse as *adam* differentiating *isha* from his previous relationship with Lilith, whom he did not see as kin.¹⁴⁴ I would suggest that it is also possible that “this time” refers back to the other times in which God brought animals to *adam* to be named. After God determines that it is not good for *adam* to be alone, Ze creates the land and air animals and brings them to *adam* “to see what [ze] would call them.” This process of naming is linked textually to the prospect of finding an *ezer k’negdo*, a companion, as Gen. 2:20 suggests, “and the [*adam*] gave names to all [the animals]... but for *adam* there was not found a[n *ezer k’negdo*].” However, when God brings *isha* to *adam*, the first thing *adam* says is an acknowledgement of their similarity. Both God and *adam* understood God’s bringing *isha* to *adam* as a continuation of the process of naming creatures and evaluating them for their ability to alleviate *adam*’s isolation. The exclamation offered by *adam* is answering the unspoken question by God, “is this a suitable companion?” It can be concluded from his language that *adam*’s understanding of *ezer k’negdo* is a being that is “bone of [his] bones, flesh of [his] flesh.”

It is also important to note that I use the word “bone” because it is the most common translation, however it is not the only possible meaning of the Hebrew. The word *etzem*, here

¹⁴³ Rosenfeld, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve.”

¹⁴⁴ Lilith is a fascinating topic within the field of feminist reclamation of the Bible, though unfortunately beyond the scope of this study.

translated as bone, can also mean “essence” or “substance,” something that goes much deeper than a shared bone extracted from one and built into the other. Furthermore, the word commonly translated as “flesh” is *basar*, which also can refer to meat, the body itself, and blood/kindred relations.¹⁴⁵ As the *basar* part of *adam*’s exclamation is decisively linked to the physical body, *etzem* must refer to something slightly different, just as *dmut* and *tselem* provide different angles from which to understand the relationship between the human and the divine. In this utterance, the *adam* acknowledges first and foremost the intangible essence that he and the *isha* share, then he immediately follows with a recognition of sameness in body. The text asserts that man and woman are, *essentially*, the same.

Another point made by the NET Biblical commentators is that, unlike the animals that he named, the *adam* does not necessarily name the *isha*.¹⁴⁶ He says that “she will be called *isha*,” using a future passive tense rather than a present or future first person (“I call her *isha*”). The only person he names in this utterance is himself, “from *ish* she was taken,” perhaps because he has just seen himself for the first time as reflected in his new companion. Later, when distinctions are drawn between the two of them and hierarchy introduced, she shall be *isha*, the marked other. Of course, such an interpretation only works when one reads *adam* and *ish* as referring to the same being; the fact that the *adam* refers to the *ish* in the third person could imply a distinction between the two, perhaps signifying *ish* as the broader male gender role rather than the specific character of *adam*.

The relationship of the *adam* and *isha* is yet unknown, beyond the three details already discussed: that *isha* is an *ezer k’negdo* to *adam*, which *adam* understands as the two sharing the

¹⁴⁵ *New English Translation Bible* (Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C., 2005).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

same body and essence, and the two have different labels: *ish* and *isha*. Unlike *zachar u'nekeva*, the words *ish* and *isha* are not linked to any anatomical details or etymologically-determined behavior (such as being “pierced”). As such, the range of interpretation swings a lot wider. Some focus on the preposition “*m*” in *etzem m'etzmi* and “*m'ish lukecha-zot*” (from *ish* she was taken) which in its simplest form means “from.” Bal argues that “‘taken from’ does not mean ‘made out of’ but ‘taken away from’ in the sense of ‘differentiated from.’... [God] made [*isha*] and [*ish*] by separating the one from the other.”¹⁴⁷ Such a division is not unequal, or one of progenitor and successor, but rather simultaneous and egalitarian.

Those who do translate it more traditionally as *isha* having her origin in *ish* take different approaches. Adler argues that this is further evidence of her assertion that Genesis 2 is the creation of sexism and androcentrism, pointing out that the text’s failure to acknowledge that *isha* is included in the *adam* (meaning humanity) gives *isha* significance only as far as she relates to *adam*: “derived from *adam*, contrasted to him and possessed by him, a construction designed to meet his specifications.”¹⁴⁸ Adler could also draw on the inequality of the speech act itself, as he is given the power to express himself and relate to others while she is (for now) denied a voice and narrative agency. Rosenfeld agrees that *adam*’s “take on the event of Eve’s birth” is “his biased interpretation... viewing her with ownership (bone of my bones), as much a parent or brother as a lover.”¹⁴⁹ In naming her according to the name he gives himself, “he names her as his mirror, *isha* to his *ish*, not necessarily as inferior, but as barely other. Her name is an affirmation of his own identity rather than an acknowledgment of hers.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 117.

¹⁴⁸ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 122.

¹⁴⁹ Rosenfeld, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve,” 140.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 141.

This last point is additionally interesting, as a number of scholars have mentioned the ambiguity of the prescribed relationship roles within which the two humans fit. They have referred to the dynamic as parent and child, brother and sister, twin siblings, and even lovers.¹⁵¹ Bal even jokes about the awkwardness of suggesting familial ties between lovers, in her argument that “The man is, then, not the parent from whom the woman is born, as another obvious reading would have it, but, if we stick to these inappropriate family metaphors, rather, her brother. He is the son of *ha-adam*, she, the daughter.”¹⁵² If one takes a semiotic approach following Bal’s example, by which elements of the story do not exist until they are stated in the text, then the discomfort facing scholars at describing this relationship is precisely because it does not even exist yet. There have not yet been any generations by which children are born and brother/sister and parent/child relationships as a *concept* can be formed. And while scholars blush at suggesting the *ish* and *isha* are like siblings, because they realize they are insinuating incest, they ignore the fact that the two have not established an explicitly romantic or sexual relationship at this point either.

According to Ladin’s analysis, the *adam* of Chapter 2 may have been initially sexed as a male, but was certainly not gendered. Gender is created when the *adam* first speaks to his new companion. In this utterance, the *adam* recognizes that, unlike the other animals that God had presented to him up to this point, *isha* is primarily like him. But also, like a little boy seeing his sister naked for the first time, he has to explain the difference he sees in front of him. Using this instance as a jumping-off point, Ladin describes gender as a construction by which “human beings... make sense of our selves [sic] and world by sorting messy, constantly

¹⁵¹ Boyarin, “Gender,” 128; Bal, *Lethal Love*, 116; Rosenfeld, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve,” 140.

¹⁵² Bal, *Lethal Love*, 116.

changing phenomena into the neat either/ors of binary categories.”¹⁵³ Additionally, as she writes in an earlier work,

Gender, then, is not a matter of bodies or even souls; as Adam recognizes when he first sees Eve, gender is a way of relating to others that enables us to feel like ourselves. To the extent that gender grows out of relationships, even within the categories of ‘male’ and ‘female,’ our genders are fluid, shifting in nuance and emphasis as we move in and out of contact with people we know and need in different ways.¹⁵⁴

Adam’s speech act and the subsequent creation of gender along the lines of similarity and difference, Ladin argues, is not an assertion of power, but rather the opposite. His loneliness is so great that “he happily sacrifices what we would now think of as the ultimate male privilege: the privilege of seeing himself as the definition and epitome of humanity.”¹⁵⁵ This argument emphasizes companionship and collaboration above domination.

The Creation of Gender Roles

<p>2:24 <i>Therefore shall [an ish] leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his [isha], and they shall be one flesh.</i></p>	<p>כַּד עַל-כֵּן, יֵעָזֵב אִישׁ, אֶת-אָבִיו, וְאֶת-אִמּוֹ; וְדָבַק בְּאִשְׁתּוֹ, וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד.</p>
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Following the *adam*’s establishment of similarity and difference, Gen 2:24 makes the first explicitly prescriptive statement, not just within *adam*’s own life but on future generations. Most translate the word *ish*to (male singular possessive of the word *isha*) as “his wife,” though such a distinction is, historically speaking, incorrect, as “the whole use of the term ‘marriage’ in connection to the Bible is somewhat problematic as the terms and concepts were clearly different than our own... translating ‘his wife’ or ‘her husband’ is... bringing in a lot of baggage that might not have been there.”¹⁵⁶ Scholars such as Meyers and Ladin disagree on whether Gen. 2:24

¹⁵³ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 5.

¹⁵⁴ Ladin, “Torah In Transition,” 8.

¹⁵⁵ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 17.

¹⁵⁶ David Lambert, Facebook, *Facebook*, (January 4, 2017), https://www.facebook.com/pg/LambertBible/posts/?ref=page_internal.

is a continuation of *adam*'s speech or a return to the detached narrative voice. Wherever they land on this issue has a profound impact on the verse's implications. One describes the words of a human who was created less than a chapter ago and is still making sense of himself, and as such certainly capable of being incorrect, making assumptions, and speaking partial truths. The other is, scripturally speaking, the literal words of God given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. For the narration to make such a claim, it is not merely an etiology or even a prediction of the future, but rather efficacious speech; the very fact of its utterance makes the words it contains so. Scholars' interpretations are thus greatly influenced by their assumptions of the verse's speaker.

Meyers interprets the speaker as the divine narrator, and translates *ishto* as "his wife."

She asserts that:

In the ideal world of Eden, male and female complement each other... a relationship aspect of the first couple's existence brings [the] chapter to a close. Verse 24 declares, in a world not yet witness to childbirth or parenthood, that a couple's union supersedes the parent-child relationship. The conjugal bond rather than the parental bond is given priority. Only in marriage are male and female complementary parts of the whole, for the parent-child relationship is an intrinsically hierarchical one in a way that the wife-husband one is not.¹⁵⁷

According to Wolfson, the kabbalists shared Meyers' understanding of the verse's speaker. They see it as a projection of behavior onto all men, whereby a man's ultimate heterosexual pairing in "one flesh" will restore to his soul the female part that went missing when humans were separated along male/female lines. Otherwise stated, "the original androgyne... is imperfect until it yields a division of the sexes... [thus] the goal of sexual desire from the male's point of view is to restore the part of him that was amputated.... the passage [Zohar 1:49a-b] gives voice to the belief that coitus ontologically, and not just functionally, is a masculinization of the female--they will be one flesh."¹⁵⁸ That is, the physical act of heterosexual coitus is not the only blurring of

¹⁵⁷ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 86.

¹⁵⁸ Wolfson, "Bifurcating the Androgyne," 102–3.

the female and male, but that there is a larger symbolic whole created when the two beings unite as a form of spiritual restoration of the missing half.

In apparent agreement with the sense of “amputation” that the abstract male experiences, Adler suggests that the narrative echoes feminist object-relations psychology. She writes:

These theorists view the primal severing of identification with mother as the precipitating event in the construction of oppositional masculine identity. Because the man did not differentiate by learning to regard woman as another independent subject with whom interrelation is possible, he both craves and fears the infantile merger that would heal his estrangement by obliterating his autonomy. He seeks to resolve his dilemma by annexing and reincorporating the other, obliterating her independent selfhood.¹⁵⁹

Adler’s interpretation emphasizes the male focus of the Zoharic exegesis, arguing that it is not simply a case of both men and women seeking to restore their other half through heterosexual relations, but rather a central conflict of the man who has gained his power through differentiation from the female and now must face reunion in order to fully annex the other.

Alternatively, those who see *adam* as the speaker in 2:24 can consider anthropathism in their interpretation of the text that they might consider irreverent or inappropriate if applied to the deity. For example, Rosenfeld views verses 23 and 24 as *adam* “making his own midrash on his desired relationship with this new woman... he envisions woman and man as intertwined, not fully separate—the man will ‘cleave’ to her and they will become ‘one flesh.’ This has a certain unhealthy quality to our therapy-trained ears—red neon signs flashing ‘codependency.’”¹⁶⁰ Ladin offers a similar reading that the verse is *adam* “imagin[ing] a future with gender-based relationships that affirm that despite their differences, men and women are ‘one flesh.’” She continues:

In Adam’s vision, the gender binary is the root from which not just romantic relationships and family but human history, imagined here as a series of conflicts between loyalty to

¹⁵⁹ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 123.

¹⁶⁰ Rosenfeld, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve,” 140–41.

parents and heterosexual attachments, grows. To express gender's rapidly multiplying ramifications, Adam adds two new binaries, 'father/mother' and 'husband/wife,' to the original association of male/female and man/woman, expanding the gender binary into a means of naming fundamental reproductive and intergenerational relationships.¹⁶¹

This passage suggests that what is established in the verse immediately following the creation of gender is much more pronounced than its predecessor: gender-based relationships, sexual reproduction (whereas previously there was just sexual dimorphism), generations over time, the notions of loyalty and intimacy... the implications multiply beyond the extent of *adam's* imagination. Ladin identifies many modern consequences of *adam's* speech act, naming inequalities that have emerged for women, queers, and transfolk based off of the presumption of the intrinsic nature of reproductive, heterosexual attachment along a fixed sex/gender binary. She concludes, however, "though male-centered and heteronormative (assuming that all people will be heterosexual), Adam's notion of gender here is still relatively benign, a means of establishing personal and family relationships rather than economic, political, or social hierarchies."¹⁶² That is, while the implications may be devastating, *adam's* intentions were merely a fantasy for continuing kinship based on equality and similarity rather than the restrictive, hierarchy-reinforcing system to which such a fantasy would lead.

¹⁶¹ Ladin, "The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity," 16.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

Genesis 3

If Chapters 1 and 2 of Genesis have the potential for debate over their egalitarian potential, Chapter 3 leaves little room for questioning the hierarchy that the end of the narrative establishes. At this point, rather than trying to explain away the inequality through alternative translations of the Hebrew or unconventional readings of the text, many scholars understand the third chapter as a reflection of “reality,” in an attempt to reconcile the hierarchical modern world with the questionably-egalitarian utopia created in the beginning of the narrative.

Isha and Agency

<p>Gen 3:4 <i>And the serpent said unto the woman: 'Ye shall not surely die;</i> 5 <i>for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as God, knowing good and evil.'</i> 6 <i>And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat; and she gave also unto her [ish] with her, and he did eat.</i> 7 <i>And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig-leaves together, and made themselves girdles.</i></p>	<p>ד. וַיֹּאמֶר הַנָּחָשׁ, אֶל-הָאִשָּׁה: לֹא-מוֹת, תָּמָתוּן ה. כִּי, יִדְעוּ אֱלֹהִים, כִּי בַיּוֹם אֲכַלְכֶם מִמֶּנּוּ, וְנִפְקְחוּ עֵינֵיכֶם; וְהִייתֶם, כִּאלֹהִים, יֹדְעֵי טוֹב וָרָע. ו. וַתִּרְאֵהָ הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֵאֵנָה-הוּא לְעֵינַיִם, וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהַשְׂכִּיל, וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיו, וַתֹּאכַל; וַתֵּתֶן גַּם-לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ, וַיֹּאכַל. ז. וַתִּפְקְחוּנָהּ, עֵינֵי שְׁנֵיהֶם, וַיֵּדְעוּ, כִּי עִרְמָם הֵם; וַיִּתְּפוּ עָלֶיהָ תְּאֵנָה, וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם חֲגָרֹת.</p>
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Yiskah Rosenfeld in particular has focused on the scene with the *isha*¹⁶³ and the snake as part of a feminist attempt to “[embrace] the character of Eve,” peppering her analysis with midrashim which she then orients around the *isha*’s perspective.¹⁶⁴ She situates her analysis in one detail from the previous chapter: the fact that the *adam* was able to name *isha* (and all of the animals), yet she does not speak until the snake asks her a question in Chapter 3. She conjectures, “If anything held Eve down, then, it was not being created from Adam’s rib—it was

¹⁶³ Following Bal’s semiotic approach that a piece of the story does not exist until it has been named within the text, I will not refer to the *isha* as “Eve” until after that point in the narrative.

¹⁶⁴ Rosenfeld, “You Take Lilith, I’ll Take Eve,” 149. Following Bal’s semiotic approach that a piece of the story does not exist until it has been named within the text, I will not refer to the *isha* as “Eve” until after that point in the narrative.

being denied the greatest commodity in the creation story, speech... she is [not] given the option to use language to rename herself, and thus develop her own identity.”¹⁶⁵ Following this line of thought, the argument that *adam*’s recognition of the *isha* is one of kinship and thus unproblematic for women would still fall flat, as the two are still unequally valued so long as *adam* has the power to speak, what’s more, to create gender itself, while *isha* remains a subject of the *adam*’s speech.

Rosenfeld sees this silence not as a sign of passivity or lack of intelligence, but rather the impetus for the agency the *isha* demonstrates in her conversation with the serpent. Having been denied speech as a means of self-discovery, Rosenfeld “can imagine her left alone, bursting with curiosity and imagination, exploring the peripheries of the garden, delving into the mystery of forbidden and secret, far from center stage. How else could she have run into a character like the serpent?”¹⁶⁶ Rosenfeld supplements this theory with rabbinical midrashim which seek to explain why *isha* was alone when interacting with the serpent, or alternatively, where was *adam*? According to Genesis Rabbah 19:3, “Abba bar Guria said: He had engaged in intercourse [literally: done according to his nature] and fallen asleep,” and later on in an alternative theory, “At that time the Holy One was taking him around the entire world, saying to him: Here is a place fit for planting trees, here is a place fit for sowing cereals.”¹⁶⁷ Rosenfeld sees both of these midrashim as “suggest[ing] to an even greater degree the loneliness with Eve,” arguing that “God deliberately excludes her, as if learning how to live off the earth is ‘a guy thing.’ Although it is a better excuse than falling asleep after sex, we are left once again with a picture of Eve as lonely and left out.”¹⁶⁸ In one case the sexual needs of the *isha* are secondary to that of the *adam*,

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 142–43.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

and in the other, the *isha* continues to be excluded from the process of creation through God's teaching of agricultural techniques only to the *adam*.

The conversation with the serpent then takes on added significance, as a being who engages directly with *isha* in a way that she has never experienced before. It asks her questions and waits for her response, but is also offering her “the chance to spread her intellectual and creative wings,” to be Godlike through eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.¹⁶⁹ Rosenfeld reframes the entire scene around the process of *isha*'s self-discovery, suggesting that the fruit is actually a “beaut[iful] and irresistib[le]... ripe, round question,” given to “an independent, thinking person who has never been asked to voice her opinion on anything, to assess information, to make a decision.”¹⁷⁰ Moreover for the serpent's offer to include knowledge on the level of the divine, “how could [the rabbis] not help but be proud, and a bit jealous, of the one who desires above all else not sex, not immortality, but wisdom?”¹⁷¹ Rosenfeld concludes that *isha*'s choice is not a product of stupidity or naiveté, as many have suggested, but an intelligent one, as evidenced in her evaluation of the merits of the tree in Genesis 3:6. Meyers echoes Rosenfeld's praise for the agency *isha* demonstrates in her quest for wisdom, pointing out:

It is the woman, and not the man, who perceives the desirability of procuring wisdom. The woman, again not the man, is the articulate member of the first pair who engages in dialogue even before the benefits of the wisdom tree have been procured... the close connection between woman and wisdom in the Bible is surely present in the creation narrative, although it is hardly limited to the beginning of Genesis.¹⁷²

Mieke Bal interprets what exactly it means to be Godlike though eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. She focuses on the word *hada'at*, “knowledge,” which shares

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 144.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 145.

¹⁷² Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 91.

the root (י-ג-ע) of the verb meaning “to know,” the biblical word used to describe sexual intercourse. She argues that within the knowledge obtained by the tree, one understands his own mortality (as God warned that they will “surely die”) as well as becoming Godlike (as the serpent suggests) through the immortality of sexual reproduction that lets one live on in the blood of his descendants.¹⁷³ Although the contemplation of such knowledge is another essay entirely, it is interesting to note the interplay between the image/likeness of God in which humans are created in Gen 1:26-27, and the option of being “like God, knowing good and evil” that happens two chapters later. Perhaps it would suggest that the “image” in Chapter 1 cannot refer to an understanding of morality. By extension the possibility for abuse between the human creatures also does not exist until the acquisition of knowledge of good and evil, of discerning moral behavior. Adam’s fantasies might have established categories, but they could not become heterosexist patriarchy until he ate from the fruit.

Consequences: The Creation of Hierarchy

<p>Gen. 3:16 <i>Unto the woman He said: 'I will greatly multiply thy pain and thy travail; in pain thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy [ish], and he shall rule over thee.'</i> {S}</p> <p>17 <i>And unto Adam He said: 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy [isha], and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.</i></p> <p>18 <i>Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field.</i></p> <p>19 <i>In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'</i></p>	<p>טז אל-הָאִשָּׁה אָמַר, הָרְבָה אֲרַבָּה עֲצָבוֹנֶיךָ וְהִרְבֵּי- בְּעֵצָב, תֵּלְדֵי בָנִים; וְאֶל-אִישֶׁךָ, תִּשְׁוָקֶתְךָ, וְהוּא, יִמְשָׁל-בְּךָ. יז וּלְאָדָם אָמַר, כִּי-שָׁמַעְתָּ לְקוֹל אִשְׁתְּךָ, וַתֹּאכַל מִן-הָעֵץ, אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵאמֹר לֹא תֹאכַל מִמֶּנּוּ-- אַרְוֵרָה הָאֲדָמָה, בְּעֵבֹרְךָ, בְּעֵצָבוֹן תֹּאכְלֶנָּה, כָּל יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ. יח וְקוֹץ וְדַרְדַּר, תִּצְמִיחַ לָךְ; וְאָכַלְתָּ, אֶת-עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה. יט בְּזֵעַת אַפֶּיךָ, תֹּאכַל לֶחֶם, עַד שׁוּבְךָ אֶל- הָאֲדָמָה, כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ: כִּי-עָפָר אַתָּה, וְאֶל-עָפָר תִּשׁוּב.</p>
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¹⁷³ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 123.

Genesis 3:16 has been regarded as one of the most “troublesome,” “disturbing,” and “grim,” verses for feminists in the Hebrew Bible, widely interpreted as “legitimizing male supremacy and female subordination.”¹⁷⁴ It contains the infamous curses against the *isha* and *adam*, whereby *isha* (and presumably, all women after her) is supposedly condemned to subordination to her male counterpart and pain during childbirth, while *adam* is burdened with painful labor. Though many feminists have stayed clear of the topic precisely because of its grim outlook for an attempt at reading gender equality into the Torah, others have sought more creative approaches that change the meanings of the curses or even the notion of curses itself.

As briefly mentioned earlier, one common explanation for the curses of 3:16-19 is that they are merely a “depiction of reality,” an etiology to explain humanity’s departure from the idyllic fantasy land of Eden and into the hierarchical, painful, labor-filled world that is more familiar to the modern reader.¹⁷⁵ Ladin sees this verse as “magnify[ing] the consequences of being male and being female... transform[ing] binary gender from a means of establishing intimate relations into a system of oppression, in which social roles, privilege and power are unequally divided on the basis of maleness and femaleness.”¹⁷⁶ Yet, despite the creation of such a system, Ladin has hope: she argues that the fact that the curses negatively affect both *adam* and *isha* “hints that there could and should be a better form of gender,” echoing Adler’s sentiments that “the redemptive truth offered by this grim depiction is that patriarchal social relations construct a world that cries out to be mended.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁴ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 95; Bal, *Lethal Love*, 126; Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 124; Phyllis Trible, “Eve and Adam: Genesis 2-3 Reread,” *Andover Newton Quarterly* 13 (1973): 251.

¹⁷⁵ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 126.

¹⁷⁶ Ladin, “The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity,” 18.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*; Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 124.

Bal argues that the verse is not a curse at all, but rather an oracle given by the deity of the humans' lives now that they have the knowledge of good and evil. She emphasizes that the word for labor, *itzvon* (עצבון) is used both to describe *isha*'s experience with childbirth and with *adam*'s experience working the land for food. Furthermore, *isha*'s desire for her *ish* is the last thing that is mentioned, despite being "the precondition for pregnancy," which Bal argues "suggests that the relation of domination comes up as an afterthought, judged less important, perhaps less fatal, than the pain of labor."¹⁷⁸ She then references Oosten and Moyer's suggestion that the admittedly ill-fitting phrase in Genesis 4:7, "and unto you [shall be] his desire / and you shall rule over him" is actually misplaced text that was supposed to be part of God's speech to the woman.¹⁷⁹ This reading could suggest a more egalitarian relationship between the two gender roles in which ruling over the other implies not hierarchy but something else, perhaps protection or care, etc. Though the interpretation is fairly radical, Bal concludes that their point is interesting but not strictly relevant to her reading, for "the relations between the sexes are fixed in terms of the semantic axes of fertility and domination, and are, as such, arbitrary. Fertility necessitates labor, and domination presupposes desire as its precondition. Power and domination establish the organization of social life, while, more specifically, the distribution of roles in reproduction, where woman produces children and man, food, organizes work."¹⁸⁰ In other words, the distinctions between the *isha* and the *adam* in the curses are arbitrary, as implied within both are desire, fertility, and labor, and as such the concept of domination is merely an abstraction of the needs of social organization.

¹⁷⁸ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 126.

¹⁷⁹ Oosten and Moyer, "De mythische omkering," 1; Bal, *Lethal Love*, 126.

¹⁸⁰ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 127.

Meyers takes a more semantic approach to the text, going word by word to problematize traditional translations through a comparison of the words' other uses in the Tanach and her deep understanding of Ancient Israelite society. She argues that what is increased for "the archetypal woman" in 3:16 is not the amount of pain one undergoes in childbirth, but rather the two independent notions of labor and pregnancy.¹⁸¹ Thus she presents the reader with the following translation:

I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies¹⁸²

(Along) with travail shall you beget children¹⁸³

She defends this interpretation by explaining that the word typically translated as "childbirth," *heron*, functions more frequently as a description of pregnancy, noting that in much Biblical writing the act of coitus and the moment of conception are closely linked. She additionally suggests that *itzvon*, in both humans' curses, definitively refers to physical labor.¹⁸⁴ Thus what is increased is the quantity of pregnancies and labor as independent factors. Furthermore, the fact that pregnancies and labor are *increasing* logically implies that they existed already in the Garden of Eden, which is supported in part by the creation of *adam* to work the land (Gen 2:5). She adds that the phrase *tel'di banim*, despite often meaning the act of childbirth, in this verb tense and context actually refers to the "more abstract notion of becoming a parent, of having children," a non-sex-binary-specific act.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸¹ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 105.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁸⁴ Meyers concludes that the translation of *itzvon* as "pain" rather than "toil/labor" is ill-fitting in this context because the word's root (ע-צ-ב) implies an emotional sort of pain, not the physical pain that accompanies the process of childbirth. Thus, the two words must be independent from each other.

¹⁸⁵ Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context*, 106.

After a continued analysis of the following lines, deemed too complicated to easily offer a single translation, Meyers summarizes:

Women have to work hard and have many children, as lines 1 and 2 proclaim; their reluctance to conform, which is not explicitly stated but can be reconstructed by looking at the biological and socioeconomic realities of ancient Palestine, had to be overcome. Lines 3 and 4 tell us how: female reluctance is overcome by the passion they feel toward their men, and that allows them to accede to the males' sexual advances even though they realize that undesired pregnancies (with the accompanying risks) might be the consequence.¹⁸⁶

To rephrase her argument in modern terms, the struggle facing Israelite women at the end of Genesis 3 is simply one of family planning in light of a healthy sex life, a challenge familiar to many working class families who do not have easy access to birth control.

Granted, it is only heterosexual partners that this situation presumes to describe, and with the explicit mention of desire in the text, there is not an easy way to work around the sexual implications for the archetypes. However, Meyers' suggestion that the women might foster sentiments of resistance towards their roles as child-bearers and passive/compliant sexual partners hints at feminist theorist Adrienne Rich's notion of "compulsory heterosexuality," which holds that heterosexuality functions as a tool by which women are systematically denied full participation in society, the home, and even their own bodies.¹⁸⁷ Despite dissatisfaction with the restrictions they face, the power of compulsory heterosexuality is that it is able to keep women dependent upon men by imposing sexual desire for their partners.

The Naming of Chava

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 117.

¹⁸⁷ Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 5, no. 4 (1980): 631–60.

The character of the *isha* is only completed, according to Bal, once she receives her name: *Chava*, or in English, Eve. She translates *Chava* as “the mother of all living,” (alternatively: “living one” or “live giver”) highlighting that in the Hebrew Bible, “naming is a meaningful act meant to establish the relation between the character and its main feature.”¹⁸⁸ Bal contends that through his name, *adam* is forever connected to the earth, *adama*, being formed out of it and eventually returning to it (Gen 3:19), and moreover that upon receiving her name, Eve realizes her role in the “climax of the creation.”¹⁸⁹ Bal further extrapolates the shared creative powers of Eve and the deity through the presence of the *vav heh* at the end of both names, claiming, “the fact that she is appointed as the future creator/provider of ‘all living,’ may well be signified in the resemblance between her name and [God’s].”¹⁹⁰ Though God did all of the creating up to this point, through her prescription to the role of motherhood Eve is now burdened with doing the future creating. She clarifies that “this argument is not meant to imply a female superiority but a functional analogy between the two creative forces.”¹⁹¹

Regardless of Meyers’ interpretations which make increased labor and reproduction less dependent upon specific sex and gender categories, the issue of compulsory heterosexuality remains a lingering barrier to full inclusivity. I am inclined to agree with Adler and Ladin in their assertion that the curses impose the recognizable hierarchies of today, possibly as a result of the ability to discern evil that the *adam* and *isha* gained from eating the fruit of the tree.

¹⁸⁸ *New English Translation Bible*; Bal, *Lethal Love*, 129.

¹⁸⁹ Bal, *Lethal Love*, 129.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The task now becomes making sense of the many different theories and approaches to evaluating the Genesis narratives for their egalitarian potential vis-à-vis the gender binary. Are there any approaches that are truly unproblematic? I identify the following as necessary obstacles for any analysis to overcome in order to conclude that their reading allows for a fully inclusive reading:

1. Gender hierarchy, by which the symbolic (yet constantly changing) category of male is systematically privileged over that of the symbolic category of female.
2. Heteronormativity, by which heterosexuality is the presumed nature of human desire and the only acceptable type of sexual behavior.
3. Sex and gender binaries, by which the two binaries are presumed to correspond to one another and are constructed based on binary understandings of the manifestations of sex characteristics

Many of the readings address one or two of these categories, but very few satisfactorily address all three. Yet, all three relate to each other in inseparable ways. If one concludes, as Adler and Meyers do, that the original humans were sexually differentiated along the sex binary and such a difference implies sexual pairing, then it is all too easy to conclude that heterosexuality is part of the natural human condition. Besides the power dynamic that many feminists argue is a part of any heterosexual act, embedded in other side of that conclusion is that to be non-heterosexual or not fall easily into the sex binary excludes one from being human. While it is certainly a valid approach to the text, it cannot be touted as liberatory for women, queers, and transfolk.

While navigating away from the issue of heterosexuality, Ladin still argues that the first manifestation of humans as sexed along a binary. Here one must tread very carefully, as the wording of this issue can make or break its inclusive potential. If one is referring to the original humans as created in one of two (and only two) sexes, the sexes being fixed and essential categories, then such a reading excludes intersex individuals and falls flat. However, if one is arguing that the first humans fell into our modern construction of male or female sexes (as most people today do), yet were not archetypal, they are merely individuals in a story whose sexual characteristics are just another detail about their characters. Additionally, one could go a step further with the discussion of sex, as Ladin ultimately concludes that humans were created *sexually dimorphic*. This would mean having a range of sexual characteristics that typically swing to one end or another of a binary, yet still have the possibility to land in between for any of a number of primary or secondary sex characteristics. Such readings allow for bodies outside the sex binary to exist and still be a part of what is human.

How does one marry this framework of interpretation with the text, if it is even possible? Some would argue that it is not, as the text was written in a time when sex, gender, and heterosexuality were not named categories of analysis but rather unquestioned aspects of life. Boyarin argues that insistence on sexual dimorphism can lead to a “recognition of sexual intercourse as pleasure for both male and female, of the value of the female body in reproduction, indeed of reproduction itself,” which “seems fated always to imprison women within a biological role.” Alternatively, the “transcendence” from sexed bodies “seems always to

be predicated on a denigration of the body and the achievement of a male-modeled androgyny, a masculine neutral,” which inevitably reintroduces the problem of gender hierarchy.¹⁹²

The first major snare in an inclusive reading of the text is that of *zachar u'nekeva*, which as previously discussed (p.15), is understood in Hebrew as possessing a penis (*zachar*) and of being pierced or penetrated (*nekeva*). Most scholars see this as tying the bodies to sex characteristics (rather than the less bodily-rooted *ish* and *isha*), as well as a passive sex role on the part of the female. Lev Fornari and Bach's readings of the phrase as a merism seems to dodge this issue of linking two essential sexes to sexual behavior, arguing that humanity was created along a full spectrum of sex and sexual manifestations. It then could be as Lev Fornari describes, “male through female,” where at one extreme is a (possibly penetrative?) male¹⁹³ and the other is a female who chooses to engage in penetrative sex, yet anything in between is also valid. Or it could be as Bach argues, that to be human is bound up in both *zachar* and *nekeva*, and that by extension each person possesses both the potential to penetrate and to be penetrated, which goes back to Adler's original description of sexuality of “overriding physical and emotional boundaries.”¹⁹⁴ Going even further, if one reads *zachar* as standalone genitalia which is not engaging in sexual behavior, the spectrum could instead consist of asexuality being at one extreme and at the other, a person whose sexual behavior is a defining part of their identity as is the case with *nekeva*. The key aspect for inclusion in the text is that the *vav* constitutes a spectrum, and that what is explicitly mentioned is not all that there is.

¹⁹² Boyarin, “Gender,” 132.

¹⁹³ That is, a person whose sex characteristics line up with the modern construction of “male” sex. The same goes for my use of female.

¹⁹⁴ Adler, *Engendering Judaism: An Inclusive Theology and Ethics*, 118.

As for Chapter 2 of Genesis, there are a number of potentially liberatory approaches. Instead of reading the *adam* character as a male who was given a female to help him, Ladin reads it as a sexed male who was lonely and required kin. In the process of distinguishing himself from his other, the *adam* created gender, with its network of complicated social roles and relations which were not, at the outset, hierarchical. This has the potential to address the issue of primogeniture, as long as *adam* signifies a sexually diverse range of human existence as manifest in one symbolic being. In such a reading, another being is created from the first being's *etzem* (body and essence). This describes a non-sex-differentiated process of reproduction. Gender is consequently a human creation as a means of navigating relationships with others of the same essence, as Ladin suggests, which informs not only romantic/sexual partners but also intergenerational relationships.

A sex-and-gender-inclusive exegesis of Chapter 3 can be achieved by synthesizing elements different scholars' interpretations. If knowing good and evil consists of the ability to instigate hierarchy and exploit other people, perhaps the curses of Genesis 3:16-19 are as Bal says, not actually curses, but efficacious speech. Because of the potential to exploit, God predicts, the gender categories that were "relatively benign" in Chapter 2 now become sites of inequality.¹⁹⁵ Henceforth, members of the gender "woman" will experience unfair reproductive burdens, compulsive heterosexuality, and systematic oppression by the gender "man." Though less oppressive, men too suffer under this new social order, confined to the role of breadwinner through unpleasant labor.

¹⁹⁵ Ladin, "The Genesis of Gender: Trans Theology and the Definition of Humanity," 17.

The outline for inclusive exegesis I suggest allows for the preservation of core theories of gender today: that gender and sex are socially constructed hierarchies around which certain socialized sexual preferences and arbitrary hierarchies develop. It upholds that the gender binary and heteronormative patriarchy are not essential to human nature or the will of God, but rather the product of the introduction of evil to human minds. The damage done by the gender binary is a product of the capability for exploitation that humans have learned, yet the knowledge of moral goodness simultaneously creates a space for such evils to be combatted.

Is there a place for gender in our society, as there was before hierarchy was introduced and humans were thrown out of the Garden of Eden? Or has gender been irreconcilably tainted by patriarchy? As Ladin concludes, what does it mean for our conceptualization of God if gender and hierarchy are not included in the “image” in which humans were created? Is a “trans theology” possible, by which “we try to look past sex and gender, bodies and binaries, to understand what in humanity reflects the image of God”?¹⁹⁶ These questions may serve as a starting point as we try to imagine a past and a future without the gender binary.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 27.

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