# THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE LITERARY INTERDEPENDENCE OF GENESIS 1 AND GENESIS 2-3

**DAVID FRIED**

It is almost taken for granted in modern biblical scholarship that Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 represent two different creation narratives. This is true whether one takes the source-critical approach that sees them as irreconcilable, or a more traditional approach that sees them as complimentary.[1] However, a close analysis of linguistic parallels between the two stories will reveal that they form parts of a single narrative, each one dependent on the other to fully understand it. In particular, we will see how Genesis 1 deepens our understanding of the sin of humanity in Genesis 2-3, and how Genesis 2-3 deepens our understanding of what it means for humanity to be created *in the image of God* in Genesis 1:27.

Genesis 1, especially when taken in comparison with other ancient Near Eastern creation stories,[2] tells us strikingly little about God. The chapter relates only what God does, not what God is. Thus, when it says that humans are created in the image of God, it must refer to the human capacity for one (or more) of the actions associated with God. This is no doubt what led *Targum Onkelos* (on Gen. 2:7) to describe humanity's uniqueness in terms of the power of speech, and centuries later led Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik to describe humanity's uniqueness in terms of their power to create.[3] Both speech and creation are verbs associated with God in Genesis 1.

A close reading of Genesis 2-3, however, suggests that the *image of God* described in chapter 1 relates to a different set of verbs. The narrative in Genesis 2-3 revolves around humans doing two actions, both of which are associated with God in chapter 1: naming things and determining things to be good. One of these is exactly what God wants Adam to do; the other God specifically commands him not to do. God wants Adam to name the animals (Gen. 2:19). God names a lot of things in chapter 1: day and night (Gen. 1:5), the sky (Gen. 1:8), and the land and sea (Gen. 1:10). Strangely, though, God stops naming things after the third day of creation. This makes sense once we read chapter 2 and realize that God is saving them for Adam to name. Seven

*David Fried teaches Judaics at the Hebrew High School of New England in West Hartford, CT. He holds rabbinic ordination from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, an MS from Stony Brook University, a BA from Brandeis University, and has studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion.*

times in chapter 1, God sees that some aspect of creation is good. In chapter 2, God commands Adam not to eat from the tree of *knowledge of good and bad* (Gen. 2:17).

Maimonides distinguishes between the objective knowledge of true vs. false and the subjective knowledge of good vs. bad. For Maimonides, this is about the superiority of the philosopher's knowledge over the politician's knowledge. The philosopher deals in the world of necessary and absolute truths. The politician has to deal with the messy contingencies of running a state.[4] Michael Wyschogrod accepts Maimonides' basic distinction between these two types of knowledge, but proposes a message that fits better with a simple read of Genesis than Maimonides' does. Naming things requires studying them and identifying their essential characteristics. This is the objective knowledge of true vs. false. The knowledge of good vs. bad is not inferior, but is the sole purview of God. Humanity is supposed to learn about and understand nature, but leave the value judgments up to God.[5] Even before Eve eats from the forbidden fruit, she *sees that it is good* (Gen. 3:6), echoing the exact language describing what God does in chapter 1. In making her own value judgment, she is usurping the role of God. The theme, then, of Genesis 2-3 is navigating the difficulties of being created in the image of God without falling into the hubris of thinking one is God.

The challenge of being in the image of God without thinking one is God is exactly the theme of the section about the naming of the animals and the creation of woman as well, if one follows Rashi's interpretation. Commenting on the verse *It is not good for man to be alone* (Gen. 2:18), Rashi comments "So that he should not say there are two domains [of power]. The Holy One, Blessed is He, is alone in the upper world and has no partner, and [I am alone] in the lower world and have no partner." Similarly, when God first brings the animals to Adam before creating the woman, Rashi (Gen. 2:20) comments, "He brought them before him, each species, male and female. [Adam] said, 'each of them have a partner and I have no partner.'" Adam needs to see that though his soul may be in the image of God, his body is in the image of the beasts. He is not immortal like God, and he is dependent on a partner for the procreation of the species. It makes sense that this section ends with *they become one flesh* (Gen. 2:24), which Rashi interprets to be a reference to children. This notion that the existence of two sexes of human

beings is meant to serve as a corrective to the potential hubris arising from being created in the image of God is briefly alluded to in chapter 1 as well. The verse immediately juxtaposes *in the image of God He created him* with *male and female He created them* (Gen. 1:27). It is this paradox of being simultaneously created in the image of God, but also a sexual being like any other animal, that is explored in greater detail in chapter 2.

Recognizing that Genesis 2-3 is about exploring which qualities of God from chapter 1 humans are supposed to emulate versus which they are supposed to avoid helps us understand the end of the story as well. The first thing Adam does after hearing God's curse to him is to give an additional name to the woman: Hava (Gen. 3:20). His returning to the process of naming can be seen as an act of repentance. He recognizes that he strayed from the task naming things into forming value judgments about them, and so he returns to what God had initially commanded him to do.

The foregoing analysis would seem to lead to the conclusion that the ideal is for people not to make any of their own value judgments, and leave that realm of knowledge purely up to God. This appears to be alluded to in Deuteronomy as well, when Moses says, *your children who do not know this day good and bad, they shall enter [the land of Israel]* (Deut. 1:39). The message he is conveying is that a condition of living in a sacred space, be it the Garden of Eden or the land of Israel, is not forming one's own judgments about good and bad.[6] Additionally, contrast, *You shall not act at all as we now act here, every man as is upright in his eyes* (Deut. 12:8) with *Do what is upright and good in the eyes of the Lord* (Deut. 6:18). Uprightness is clearly a value judgment, and Deuteronomy is telling us that we must judge based on what is upright in the eyes of the Lord, not what is upright in our eyes.

This explanation is plausible and is consistent with the first explanation Nachmanides provides on the verse of *Do what is upright and good in the eyes of the Lord* (Deut 6:18). "On a simple level, this means that you should observe the commandments of the Lord, and His testimonies and statutes, and in doing them intend to do what is good and upright in His eyes alone." Nachmanides however, offers a second, and probably more famous, explanation. "It would be impossible for the Torah to mention every possible interaction that a person could have with their neighbors and friends, or every possible business dealing, or everything necessary for the upkeep of villages and

states. However, once it mentioned many of them…it gave a general rule that one should do what is good and upright in every matter." This latter approach certainly allows for humans to form their own value judgments, even if those judgments are to be guided by God's instructions. There is another way one can read the story in Genesis that is consistent with this second approach. It must be noted that the unfolding of events in Genesis 2-3 very strongly resembles the process of a child growing up. This seems to be the point Rabbi Yehudah is making when he suggests that the forbidden fruit was wheat, "because a child does not know how to call for his mother and father until he tastes grain" (TB *Sanhedrin* 70b). Like small children, Adam and Eve start out with no shame in being naked (Gen. 2:25). Children begin their lives learning many facts (naming the animals), with their parents making the value judgments for them. The first act of a child forming his or her own value judgments is disobeying the parent's instructions. This often has negative consequences for a child who does not really have the understanding yet to make good decisions. In this read, eating the forbidden fruit was really an inevitable part of growing up. This is supported by looking at the consequences of eating from the forbidden fruit: awareness of sexuality (Gen. 3:7), pain in childbirth (Gen. 3:16), needing to work hard to earn a living and awareness of mortality (Gen. 3:19), and finally the loss of the paradise-like environment of childhood where everything is provided for you (Gen. 23-24). Each of these is a concern that children are blissfully unaware of, but begin to take cognizance of as they grow older.[7]

God, in this approach, is not forbidding people from forming their own value judgments, but trying to teach them to make good judgments. The woman's decision to eat from the forbidden fruit is motivated, at least in part, by it being *desirable to the eyes* (Gen. 3:6). She is substituting aesthetic beauty for inherent value,[8] and needs to learn how to assess true value. This would fit with Deuteronomy 1:39 as well. God wants the *children who do not know this day good and bad* to be the ones to enter the Promised Land. Unlike the first approach proposed above, it is not that God wants people who never form their own independent judgments of good and bad. Rather, God wants *children* who do not yet form their own independent judgments of good and bad. In this manner, their moral development, their learning to form proper judgments about good and bad, will be guided by God and God's command-

ments, as Nachmanides described in his second explanation, and not by some other society's value system.

The end of the Garden of Eden story is especially telling in this read. As mentioned above, Adam goes back to the process of naming. If we compare the name he gives the woman at this point, with the name he initially gave the woman, we can see the maturation process that has taken place. Initially, Adam says, *'This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. This one shall be called woman (ishah), for from man (ish) was she taken.'* (Gen. 2:23) While he is listening to God in engaging in the process of naming, it is still a rather childish, self-centered name. The name he gives the woman is all about the ways she is like him, rather than what is truly unique about her. At the end of the story, *The man named his wife Hava, because she was the mother of all the living (Hai).* (Gen. 3:20). Here, the name is no longer about him, but truly recognizes what makes the woman unique. A mature Adam, now fully able to form his own value judgments, forms the judgment that God's instructions to him were right all along, and is able to obey God in a more mature way than he was in the beginning. This understanding of the story points to a different relationship between Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 than in the first approach discussed above. It is not about exploring the challenges inherent in being created in the image of God. Rather, it is about exploring the process of becoming in the image of God, which involves multiple qualities that humans develop over time.

Through both of the approaches discussed here, the literary interdependence of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 is clear. God stops naming things in chapter 1 after the third day of creation, in order to give Adam the chance to name them in chapter 2. Naming and seeing things to be good are both actions prominently associated with God in chapter 1. Recognizing this gives us a deeper understanding of what is going on in chapters 2-3. Through an exploration of these same actions as they relate to humans, chapters 2-3 help us understand in greater depth what it means to be created in the image of God.

NOTES

1. See, for example, J. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (Jerusalem: Maggid, 1965-reprinted 2012).
2. Most notably, the *Enuma Elish*. W.G. Lambert's translation available at: http://www.etana.org/node/581
3. J. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man,* L. Kaplan, trans. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983) pp. 100-101.
4. *Guide for the Perplexed*, 1:2.
5. M. Wyschogrod, "Sin and Atonement in Judaism," in *The Human Condition in the Jewish and Christian Traditions,* F. Greenspahn, ed. (Hoboken: Ktav, 1986) pp. 104-111.
6. This connection was shared with me by Rabbi Aryeh Klapper.
7. A student of mine suggested that the snake losing its legs may fit this theme as well, symbolizing that we no longer believe in the fantastical imaginary creatures of our youth, like talking snakes with legs.
8. See Nachmanides and Gersonides ad loc.