

Chapter 6: The Fall

65 million years ago, an asteroid roughly the size of Mt. Everest plowed through Earth's atmosphere. While a significant fraction of its mass evaporated as it descended, the core slammed into the ground in the vicinity of what is now Guatemala. A shock-wave of superheated air ignited forests across half of the globe. Large pieces of earth crashed back to the ground, but ash and dust rose into the stratosphere, blocking the sun's light for many years. All of the larger biological forms died in the initial conflagration, or perished of starvation as their food sources vanished in the extended winter that followed.

The event brought to an end an incredible evolutionary romp. The dinosaurs explored the limits that biological forms could achieve in exploiting their environment. Skeletal remains indicate 30-ton killing machines with razor-sharp claws and massive jaws, and herbivores with mouths capable of gathering hundreds of pounds of vegetation in a single bite. These specimens occupied the seas, land and air. Collectively, they represented an awesome system for conversion of matter and energy into forms of muscle and bone.

While reptiles survived the disaster that ended the Cretaceous Period, they were unable to re-establish their dominance. They were replaced by the mammals, creatures that have never replicated the dinosaurs' physical power. Instead, mammals possess a neuronal advantage: the limbic system. The behaviors it facilitates are a critical advantage. Today, the newborn Komodo dragon must climb a tree or be eaten by its mother. The newborn mammal is cared for and survives.

However, we should be surprised if the glory of the dinosaurs' material accomplishments had left no trace in the spiritual domain.

Blood Ties

The demise of the dinosaurs did not alter the primary patterns of survival. Carnivores sit atop the food chain, feeding on larger populations of herbivores that convert cellulose to protein. As did the dinosaurs, each class raised exemplars over the roughly 65 million years before man's advent.

The genus *homo* would have seemed an unlikely champion in Darwin's struggle. Our precursors were individually no match for either the meat or plant eaters. The fortune of *homo*'s omnivorous diet may have enabled them to survive in environments that would not support larger animals of either type, but their physical frailty would have prevented them from achieving widespread dominance.

Then, in a blink of Darwin's eye, genus *homo* spread like a plague across the globe. The immediate cause of its success was not a gross biological change. It was instead the realization that they could exploit the byproducts of geology, botany and biology to compete physically with larger creatures. Mankind discovered tools.

The history of tool making is complex, and not always tied to violence. Ancient jewelry and pottery testifies to the peaceful applications of this capacity. No primitive culture, however, lacks

the experience of the hunt. Whether to protect or provide, killing prey with tools was essential to the survival of individuals and groups.

This brought humanity into a new spiritual experience: where once we had scavenged meat, we now actively stalked and slew prey. We entered into spiritual association with hundreds of millions of years of creatures that survived through blood dominance. Obviously, physical dominance had always been a part of human social interaction. As the king of the hunt, however, humanity had the capacity to subdue the spiritual energy of its prey. Blood had been our predatory predecessors' means for achieving spiritual dominance. It is a powerful spiritual pattern that we have had trouble putting aside.

Moving up on the food chain occasioned the development of roles specialized to the characteristics of individuals. The chief, shaman and warrior are all male archetypes. But the most profound division was between men and women, reflecting the demands of pregnancy and the dependency of infancy. In almost every culture, men continued to go out on the hunt, while women stayed behind to nurture and craft.

While no longer active participants in the hunt, women did not lack a powerful experience of blood spirituality. The menstrual cycle, sex and pregnancy are all extremely powerful blood rites. The controlling element is the menstrual cycle. Every parent observes the marked change in a daughter's psychology as she enters puberty. Menopause seems to permit the re-emergence of their pre-menstrual character.

The womb is a delicate instrument intended to serve a single sacred purpose: to provide a haven in which flesh and spirit can merge. As a male, I can only guess at the overwhelming intimacy of that process. It is a process that entails spiritual consequences for the rest of the mother's life. The joys of a beloved child are the mother's joys; the child's hurts and sorrows her hurts and sorrows.

This procreative intimacy is entangled with the sexual intimacy between the female and her mate. The Bible recognizes this bond through a rationalizing myth:

...[The LORD God] took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib...
[NIV Genesis 2:21-22]

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh. [NIV Genesis 2:24]

When couplings are not stable, children become objects in the spiritual struggle between powerful males. In many mammalian family groups, this is resolved in the social structure of the pride. The single dominant male mates with and provides security for a number of females and their children. In humans, this was resolved *partially* through the parallel society of the hunt.

I say partially, because the practices of sexual procreation have an ancient spiritual history, just as does the hunt. If women sustained the spiritual cohesion of the group while men were out on the hunt, they also had Darwinian drives that caused them to compete for biological dominance,

in part by manipulating the attentions of powerful mates.

We see then that both men and women have competing tendencies. Men protect - or hunt. Women nurture – and manipulate. It is obvious that Life had to resolve these competitions if it was to move beyond the inefficient destructiveness of blood spirituality. The human experiment has been an attempt by Life to resolve those contradictions through the discipline of the mind.

Eden

If we have gained anything from our reading of the Jewish story of creation, it is that anthropocentrism has been a liability to understanding. Obviously, the spirit of the carnivore was always in competition with the spirit of its prey. I have suggested previously that the violence of that struggle may have resulted in a state of near disassociation between the prey's spirit and body. The spirit of the prey species would have survived in the mammalian herd, avian flock and piscine school. Conversely, the spirit of the carnivorous species may have been focused in dominant individuals.

When mankind began its viral spread, the existing spirits must have done a gut check. What was this creature, and how would it affect the balance of Life? It obviously had powerful spiritual capacities.

[The LORD] brought [the beasts of the field and birds of the air] to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. [NIV Genesis 2:19]

Naming is a powerful spiritual activity. It creates a link between spiritual and material forms, strengthening the bond between them, eroding the coherency of the herd.

The transformative potential of this capacity must have been apparent, and what ensued was a struggle to control it. In the proximity of Eden, a symbiotic bargain was struck.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden...[He] made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground-trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food... [NIV Genesis 2:3-5]

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. [NIV Genesis 2:15]

What was the nature of this symbiosis? In Eden, Humanity served as the senses and hands of Spirit, allowing it to manage its structure through direct work on material forms.

What value would this have been to the citizens of Eden? Remember that the ancient spirit had been storing structure and power for at least a billion years. That huge reservoir of power brought great benefits. Archaeologists have determined that the ancient civilization of the Euphrates river valley was agriculturally privileged. As in ancient China, India and Greece, it was a land in which very little effort was required to grow food. From the curse after the fall, we can also infer that women had ease in childbirth.

There was an injunction, however:

In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil... [NIV Genesis 2:9]

And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” [NIV Genesis 2:16-17]

What were these two trees? The story suggests that they bore magical fruit, but that should lead us immediately to consider them as spiritual metaphors. We will return to the question in a moment.

We should notice now, however, that this injunction was communicated to men. Male egos have historically interpreted this as a reflection on masculine cortical superiority. I tend to see it as a response to the danger posed by masculine aggression, which resonated powerfully with the pattern of predation. It was a spell intended to ward away the predator.

What was not appreciated was the danger of the ancient patterns of sexual manipulation. Why should women surrender their men to the ancient spirits? The Bible's rendering of the manipulative sophistication of the Cretaceous reptilian remnant is almost delicious:

[The serpent] said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”

The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

[NIV Genesis 3:1-5]

Eve took of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and shared it with man. The benefits of that choice are subtle and ambiguous – see the next section for a discussion. Conversely, the Bible lists concrete punishments for the transgression; the most significant is phrased metaphorically.

[T]he LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”

So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden...

[NIV Genesis 3:22-24]

The emphasis is mine: *Us*. The LORD spoke for a collective. In the story of Eden, the priestly class had not yet imposed the pattern of monotheism on the Jewish spiritual experience.

Variations on Two Trees

Humanity is omnivore: both of the predator and the herd. The story of the Garden of Eden dates from late in the oral tradition. It documents one episode in the ongoing assimilation of Humanity into the Spirit of Life. The rest of the reveals a see-saw struggle between predator and herd.

The story of creation and the fall appear clearly to originate with the herd. The predatory reptile is completely written out of creation, and the story of Eden documents a symbiosis with the vegetarian pattern of survival. In later chapters, the rite of blood sacrifice shows Humanity's hands in the service of the predator. Each, in their turn, is assigned the authority of the Eternal, ensuring the political continuity of the priestly class.

While later stories have definite historical references, the story of Eden demonstrates both the virtues and frailties of an oral tradition. The specific events are abstracted and generalized, with each new telling providing an opportunity to weave another thread of meaning into the story. In this way, the two trees came to carry broad social and spiritual significance.

What was the Tree of Knowledge, from which we gained knowledge of good and evil?

In the interpretation given above, the apple represents the choice to pursue a uniquely human path through history, unconstrained by the dictates and considerations of other species. It is the choice to grasp reality by the roots, learning to bend it to our will against the desire of the herd for continuity.

With that independence came responsibility for our actions, including spiritual conflict with forms that we have pushed towards annihilation. In this epic struggle, no quarter should have been expected. Inevitably, physical conflict of men against men would ensue, as our primitive psychological motivations were manipulated by the ancients to pit us against each other.

A second interpretation focuses on the rise of religion. In the context of the village, and with the advantage of the maternal bond, women formed a close spiritual gestalt. Through mechanisms we will discuss later, the experience of childbirth became a gateway to ancient knowledge and wisdom. Through the years, that repository developed into the personality of the Goddess. Icons representing the maternal goddess predate masculine icons by 30,000 years.

In this second interpretation, Eve shared the secret with Adam, teaching him the practice of religion: the social process for constructing an immortal repository of spirit. It is perhaps not surprising that Adam would choose to start a new team, dedicated to men.

A third thread emphasizes the transition from hunter-gatherer to agricultural lifestyles. This would have been a serious threat to the standing of men, who were essential to predation. In the agricultural setting, women could potentially have managed physical survival on their own. (There are extremely undesirable spiritual consequences of this arrangement, but we will

consider those later.) The spread of agriculture would also have disrupted the ecology of the prey species, magnifying the difficulty of the hunt.

One can imagine the political struggle attendant to this social change. (It has a modern manifestation in Sudan.) In the context of that struggle, an ecological crisis intervened: as the last Ice Age moderated, warming in the region of Eden caused the collapse of agriculture there. (The Bible identifies the location: it is under the Gulf of Arabia, which was flooded when planetary warming melted the glacial ice.)

Holding to form, the male tendency would have been to interpret ecological collapse as a judgment from the gods. This could have been used to justify a social system for female repression. A significant component of that system would have been a privileged male role in religion.

What of the Tree of Life?

In the third interpretation, it might represent the lost arcadia of Eden. Where once the region had thrived with plants and animals, now it was dead.

In the second interpretation, the tree of life would have been the sacred feminine tradition, which Adam and his brethren chose to abandon in favor of a religion with a masculine emphasis.

Obviously, I have here chosen to elevate the first interpretation, the story of Humanity's spiritual integration. In that story the meaning of the Tree of Life is more subtle. I can render it only through the context of a dream.

Over the last four years, as the ecological implications of Global Warming have developed, I have entered into an exploration of the spiritual consequences of the crisis. In that space of experience, the fear felt by Life allowed me to enter its Spirit at the most fundamental level. From that perspective, each ecosystem is a branch, which divides into species and individuals in a thicket of threads that resembles a tree. In that most beautiful and heart-rending of visions, I cupped that tree in my hands. And willed it to live.

Consequences

The Ancients understood the challenge facing Humanity. They accepted that we were driven to adopt another process for living. It was in part a synthesis of predator and herd, but under the discipline of a capacity that they could not fully experience: the capacity of reason in the service of change.

The experience of the herd is to protect and endure. That is antithetical to the predator, which forces change through tests of physical fitness. For hundreds of millions of years the two had coexisted without achieving a resolution. Mankind inherited the problem. Each practice has its value and purpose. It is our path to learn to harmonize them.

The Catholic exorcist lives on the front lines of the spiritual struggle between predator and prey. One of them, Father Amorth, has documented his experience plumbing the depths of demonic

psychology (*An Exorcist Tells His Tale* [1]). Two statements are particularly important. First, demons report that Hell is a place not of fire and punishment, but of complete isolation. Clearly, the ancients have evolved methods for isolating wantonly destructive individuals. Secondly, demons claim not to hate , but to “test him.”

The story of Cain and Abel encapsulates the struggle.

Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. Then Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor... [NIV Genesis 4:3-5]

Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, [there will be uplift]. But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you can master it.” [NIV Genesis 4:6-7]

Cain was the elder child, and in the traditions of that time, probably lorded it over his brother. The message of the offerings is that accidents of material form are irrelevant. Bringing the first offering does not matter. Receiving the Lord’s favor was inconsequential. The signal provided us by life is felt inside of us, as “uplift”. This is the connection we feel when we aid another. It is the energy liberated when the barriers between us are dissolved, allowing us to unite our personalities.

Cain fails his test. His jealousy of his brother’s grace ends in Abel’s murder. Cain is cast out of his father’s community. When he complains that he will be certain to be murdered himself, the story continues:

But the LORD said to him, “Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.” Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. [NIV Genesis 4:15]

This is the wisdom of mercy. The sin of predation against his fellow man overcame Cain. But the consequence of the sin would motivate Cain to struggle against that influence for the rest of his life. Through that struggle, Cain would infiltrate the spirit of the predator, slowly infusing it with an understanding of mercy.

Father Amorth documents a pattern that suggests some of the best among us still fall in that struggle. Prior to their possession, most victims were widely regarded for their grace. One of the failures of grace is to give too much of yourself, psychologically and physically, in an attempt to heal those around you. When that burden became overwhelming, Amorth's subjects reported calling out in desperation for help. That call formed a bridge to an entity that had the skills to methodically and brutally separate them from the source of their suffering. It brought them a spiritual predator that rescued them from dysfunctional relationships, and then proceeded to consume their lives.