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## Wings of Desire: Two Myths of Origin and Their Ethical Implications

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As is well known, origin myths are not only etiologies for how the world came to be the way it is, but also statements of fundamental values and convictions. Though cast as narratives about a distant past, they have a strong normative function. The moral imaginations embedded in particular myths of origin establish perceptual frameworks that have implications for evaluating novel situations and directing appropriate decisions. Although Christian theology found its primary myth of “the Fall” in Genesis 2-3, not all strands of contemporary Judaism saw that story as the crucial explanation of the brokenness of the world. For certain apocalyptically oriented Jews the fundamental story of the origin of evil in the world was the elaboration of Gen. 6:1-4, as it is found in *1 Enoch* 6-16. The book of *1 Enoch* was also quite influential in early Christianity, though it eventually declined in popularity, until it came to be regarded as authoritative only in Ethiopian Christianity. I wish to make a case, however, for the continuing theological and ethical significance of the book, particularly as that significance can be seen by putting it into conversation with Genesis 2-3.

The two stories in Genesis and *1 Enoch* are strikingly different. They pertain to different periods of the Bible’s primeval history, involve different characters, and have different plots. More significantly, they articulate strikingly different moral imaginations. Nevertheless, they

both employ some of the same images, figures, and themes, though these function quite differently. Here are two texts that ought to get together and have a conversation. As valuable as it might be simply to compare and contrast these two texts with one another, I think more may be elicited from such a dialogue. Every moral imagination is a way of perceiving and a way of thinking. If one can characterize the contrasting moral imaginations of these texts, might it be possible to think with their resources about a modern ethical dilemma, specifically the issue of cross-species genetic manipulation? Such a venture may sound far-fetched, but if successful, it may suggest a model for engaging the Bible in ethical reflection.

In what follows I wish to do three things. First, to reflect on why some of the issues raised in origin myths never go away: specifically, what the nature of human being is and what the nature of the world is. Second, to conduct a comparison of the two stories in Genesis and *I Enoch*. In particular, I want to draw attention to what I see as an implicit conversation between the two texts concerning (1) the role of desire as constructive or destructive of the human and its world, and (2) the significance of the figure of the “monster,” that is, the creature who mixes two natures. Finally, I want to show how the basic understanding of the world sketched in these two texts can lead to contrasting but equally profound moral stances toward the issue of cross-species genetic manipulation.

### *The Persistence of Origin Myths*

Though modern culture may no longer set its stories in the long ago and far away, popular culture—novels, movies, especially science fiction—is often concerned to raise certain questions characteristic of origin myths—what does it mean to be a human being? What is the nature of the world and our proper place in it? The persistence of these questions is illuminated

by the insight made by Clifford Geertz, who observed that human beings are “incomplete animals.” Whereas other animals have their instincts sufficiently “hardwired” into their brains to function successfully, humans do not. Consequently, we have to complete ourselves and our worlds through the symbolic constructions of culture.<sup>2</sup> The question about what a human being is, is one that can never be settled once and for all, because there is no final answer. The stories we tell construct possible identities, but identities that can be questioned and contested by other stories.

Whenever one tries to define something (e.g., a human being) one tends to do so by comparison or contrast. How is this like or unlike that? What is the boundary marker between this and that? Naturally enough, in the stories of origin that try to say what a human being is, one of the ways of doing so is by comparing or distinguishing humans from animals, or humans from divine beings. In our modern world we have added a third set of comparisons: humans and machines. Such boundaries, however, are always constructed rather than given and involve very specific decisions about what feature or features will mark the boundary between humans and animals, humans and machines, humans and gods. The fact that these boundary lines have to be constructed also means that they are always fragile and subject to falling apart. If language distinguishes humans from animals, what about animals who can be taught to use sign language? If the ability to think and feel is the boundary between humans and machines, what about artificial intelligence computers that some argue can actually think—and perhaps may even come to have emotions? Not only science fiction, but philosophy, too, is now puzzling over the ethical status of the machines of the future. As for the difficult boundary between humans and gods, that is the concern of Genesis 2-3, the ways in which we have become “like gods” but are not gods.

These perplexities are intrinsic to the task of conceptual boundary making. But the modern world faces additional dilemmas, now that science is quite literally dissolving some of the taxonomies that used to organize our world. When animal organs and tissues are placed in human bodies, when genes can be transferred from animals to plants to humans and vice versa, when we are increasingly becoming “bionic” persons, with a variety of implanted machines, the boundaries that distinguish person, animal, and machine are put in question. How to deal with the fluidity of such boundaries poses not only conceptual but ethical dilemmas. Are there some boundaries that are sacrosanct? Or is this process simply part of the creation of new life forms?

### *Genesis and I Enoch*

At this point I wish to examine what these two stories of origin, Genesis 2-3 and *I Enoch* 6-16, have to say about what it means to be human, what the nature of the world is, and how it came to be the way it is today. Despite the lack of overlap in these stories, each examines what it considers to be *the* crucial episode by which the world acquired its present reality. The story in Genesis is fundamentally preoccupied with the issue of what it means to be human. It tells how what was not yet recognizable as fully human (the creature ‘*adam*’) comes to be what we know as human (having two sexes, equipped with moral agency, pursuing life outside the garden). This story deals explicitly with the question of the boundary between the animal and the human on the one hand and the divine and the human on the other. The stories that follow, especially in Genesis 4-11, deal with the consequences for the world of the unintentionally constructed human, consequences that include the emergence of evil and its containment.

The relevant story in *I Enoch* starts with human beings already in place. Its primary focus is not on constructing the human. Rather, it is concerned with the origin of evil in the

world, how humans came to be corrupted, and why the world is a broken world.<sup>3</sup> It explores this topic, however, largely by means of the figure of violated boundaries, especially the boundary between the divine and the human. And in telling this story about the brokenness of the world, it does have important things to say about the nature of human existence.

From this brief characterization, it should be evident why these stories invite comparison. In Genesis the critical action starts with a desire of the human for that which belongs to the divine (the knowledge that makes one like the gods). In *1 Enoch* the action starts with a desire of the divine (the angels) for that which properly belongs to humans (sex and procreation). Desire is thus an important element in both stories, as is the role of transgressed boundaries. In both, knowledge plays an important role. Humans *take* knowledge in Genesis, and in Enoch angels will *give* heavenly knowledge to humans. In Genesis humans are active agents. But in Enoch humans appear to be more sinned against than sinning--at least at first. In sum, though these two stories ostensibly tell episodes from different periods of the mythic history of the human race, at the level of theme and imagery they appear to be very much in competition and conflict about the nature of the world and of human beings.

### *Genesis 2-3*

As many commentators have observed, the Christian theological interpretation of Genesis 2-3 simply as a narrative of a "fall" is somewhat misleading. From a comparative religions perspective Genesis 2-3 is perhaps better described as a birth story, one that describes the birth of humans and the birth of culture. In order to tell this story, it has to construct two boundaries, the animal/human boundary and the human/divine.

Animals are first introduced in Genesis 2:18-20 in response to God's perception that "it is not good for *ha-'adam* to be alone." The intention is to form "a helper corresponding to him." Every detail of the text appears to assert the fundamental commonality between humans and animals. Not only are they made from the same substance (the *'adamah*) but God also seems to anticipate that *ha-'adam* will find his companion among them. That is, of course, the purpose of the naming. If *ha-'adam* gives a name to an animal that establishes some sort of linguistic relationship with his own name, then that will be the sought for companion. But *ha-'adam* does not in fact recognize such a helper among the animals. The pun of recognition appears only when God has decided to "subdivide" *ha-'adam*, who declares in verse 23: "This is woman (*'ishah*), for from man (*'ish*) she was taken." Though the episode *hints* at a difference between these not-quite-yet-humans and the animals, it ends without constructing a clear boundary between them. That boundary will emerge only later, as a consequence of the *confusion* of the boundary between humans and divine beings.

That crucial episode is the one involving the tree, the talking snake, and the conversation. The snake engages the woman in conversation about what trees are and are not off limits to the man and woman. When the woman identifies the tree of the knowledge of good and bad as the one that cannot even be touched upon pain of death, the snake refutes her judgment and insists, correctly, that the humans will not die: "But God knows that on the day you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like gods, knowing good and bad" (3:5). The knowledge that comes from the fruit is, as many commentators have argued, not simply knowledge of moral good and evil but rather the knowledge that makes all kinds of judgments possible, the power to make reflective, discriminating choices, between what seems good and what seems bad.

The significance of the next line is debated. This is the line that describes the woman seeing the fruit and taking it. One might object that the woman already seems to have the power to choose between good and bad because she *chooses* to eat the fruit, even though the power of choice should be the consequence of that act. Perhaps it is the storyteller's failure in the face of a difficult narrative moment. The author of Genesis 3 knows that humans as he experiences them have the capacity to make rational choices; but how does one describe the act by which that capacity was achieved? I would argue, however, that the story is not being clumsy here but rather is making a subtle distinction. When the focus of the narrative shifts from the snake's words to the woman's perspective, what the narrator's words describe is simply the moment of *desire*. And desire is not the same as discriminating judgment. The sentence emphasizes the involvement of the senses and uses the vocabulary of appetite and desire: "Then the woman *saw* that the tree was good *to eat*, and that it was *pleasurable to look at*, and that it was *desirable* for making wise, and she took some of its fruit and she ate" (3:6a). The desire for wisdom is described in language that suggests it is not truly a rational choice but is folded into a more enveloping experience of desire that operates on a pre-rational level. It is no accident that the crucial symbolic object in this story is a food rather than, for example, a talisman of some sort. Food is a basic object of desire, grounded in our physical selves. Desire is thus a quality intrinsic to our pre-human state, but it is the one that serves as the mechanism by which decisive change is set in motion.

Consequently, it is important to reflect on the structure of desire. Ever since Plato's *Symposium*, desire has been described above all in terms of lack. But the condition of lack is not properly a negative one. Desire is always desire *for* some thing, and so it is a form by which persons go beyond themselves, transcend themselves. In fact desire helps to create one's sense

of oneself as a self, because desire teaches one about the nature of boundaries. Anne Carson examines this element in her book on desire in early Greek poetry, *Eros the Bittersweet*. In her words, “the experience of eros [or desire] as lack alerts a person to the boundaries of himself, of other people, of things in general. It is the edge separating my tongue from the taste for which it longs....”<sup>4</sup> Thus the thing I desire is different from me, outside of me, but I want to draw it to myself, for it to become me or at least mine. Carson notes that in the play of desire a curious shift of perspective occurs. I want it to be mine because even though I never knew I lacked it before I saw it, this thing or person now appears as a *necessary* part of myself. I am incomplete without it, and so I draw it to myself.<sup>5</sup> This is the brilliant artistry of Genesis 2-3. The author knows that human beings are in fact characterized by the capacity for discriminating judgment represented by the tree of knowledge. That is a necessary part of what it means to be a human being. But the story takes the reader back to the moment of desire, when this capacity to make judgments, represented symbolically by the desirable fruit, was both outside of us, and yet seen and longed for, felt for the first time as a necessary part of who we are.

And the result of desire fulfilled? “And their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked” (3:6b-7a). At this remove, it is difficult to know if the story intended this line to be humorous, though I think it likely. This perception hardly seems like wisdom of the gods. And yet, it is a brilliant and densely packed symbol.<sup>6</sup> Mostly, the image has been associated with awakened sexuality. That is not entirely incorrect, since the fig-leaf coverings the woman and the man make for themselves serve to cover the genitals. But the recognition of sexual difference is not the primary issue here. After all, sexual difference was what the man had exclaimed so happily about when he first saw the newly created woman in Gen. 2:23. Something else is primarily at stake here. Perhaps one can get at it by considering the contexts in which the word

“naked” can and cannot meaningfully be used. It is a word that can appropriately be used only of human beings. One cannot properly say of a trout or a lion or a deer that it is “naked.” The concept of nakedness is one of the sharpest boundaries between the animal and the human.<sup>7</sup> Animals make many things: shelters, tools, perhaps even weapons. But no animal makes clothes. Or, as the Yahwist might say, an animal is naked but not ashamed. Thus as the woman and the man confuse the boundary between themselves and the divine, that action simultaneously establishes the definitive boundary between themselves and animals. If humans have become “like gods,” the consequence is that they are no longer like animals.

But what exactly is this “eye-opening” knowledge? As the philosopher and ecologist Baird Callicott observes, what the woman and the man see is *themselves*. They become *self-aware*, *self-conscious*; and this self-consciousness is the prerequisite for the experience of shame. And so they make clothes to cover themselves. That quality of self-awareness is also what distinguishes humans from the other animals.<sup>8</sup>

It is not self-evident, however, why the story would conceive of the ability to discriminate between good and bad *not* to have been appropriate to humans in the first place. The reason appears to be this. Humans can now choose, but all choice has to be made with reference to some center of value. And what will that be? With the emergence of self-awareness comes the possibility of self-centeredness, both individual self-centeredness and the species self-centeredness we call anthropocentrism. To grasp the full significance one has to think of the combining of desire and self-consciousness of which this story speaks. For the animals the powerful engine of desire operates within boundaries set by the hard-wiring of their instincts. But in humans desire has now become conjoined with a reflective and creative self-

consciousness. This is not to say that all human choices are necessarily tainted by self-centeredness. The combination of desire, with its other-directedness, and of self-consciousness, with its capacity to imagine the self *as other* can also result in acts of great generosity. Agape as well as eros becomes a possibility for the human. But desire, coupled with self-conscious choice, is a highly unstable and unpredictable mixture. The birth of the human changed the world forever.

The stories that follow in Genesis 4-11 play out some of the consequences of what it means that we have become human. These stories tell of the birth of civilization that follows from the birth of the human. And the arts of civilization, according to this account, variously include murder (Gen 4:8) and musical instruments (4:21), urban planning (4:17) and cycles of revenge (4:23-24), metallurgy (4:22), animal husbandry (4:20), and the practice of religion (4:26). The presence of the human in the world seems to introduce a degree of creative unpredictability. Yet the human who comes to be in these narratives is a good fit for the world constructed by the text. As has long been noted, the character of God and the structure of the narrative itself seem to have an open, experimental quality. The world, as it is seen from the perspective of Genesis 2-3, has an open architecture, and the odd, non-self-identical creature that is the human seems well suited to its possibilities.

All is not free play, however. There are boundaries and limits that foreshadow the dangerousness of this creature. Humans *may not* become fully gods. As the events of Genesis 2-3 have blurred what had been the boundary of knowledge between humans and divine beings, it becomes necessary to establish the difference by another criterion. Humans are expelled from

the garden to prevent access to the tree of life and so from the immortality which now becomes the defining difference between the human and the divine (3:22-24).

Before turning to the story of *I Enoch*, there is one final observation to make. According to this narrative in Genesis human beings are something very close to what we might call monsters. A monster, by dictionary definition, is “a legendary animal...[with] a form either partly brute and partly human or compounded of elements from several brute forms....abnormal,” though the word also connotes “something unnaturally marvelous.”<sup>9</sup> As this definition suggests, things that blur categories, things that transgress boundaries are often treated as objects of fear, horror, and loathing. They are monstrous. Yet this story claims just such a monstrous identity as the very shape of the human. And though the story sees this new mixed monster as problematic, it does not recoil in horror. The reason for raising this point is that in some strands of postmodern thought the category of the monstrous has been reclaimed as a positive and ethically significant image precisely for its power to expose the various ways in which humans form identities not just by establishing boundaries but by transgressing boundaries.<sup>0</sup> While Genesis 2-3 is certainly not itself a postmodern text, it has more affinities with postmodern perspectives than have yet been explored.

### *I Enoch 6-16*

The relevant narrative in *I Enoch* does not tell a story about how humans came to be humans. In fact such a story would be utterly unpalatable to *I Enoch*, because—to use philosophical categories—it perceives the world not through the category of Becoming but through the category of Being. Thus, even though *I Enoch* 6-16 and Genesis 2-3 talk about some issues that overlap, they begin from different starting places. Though it is a noncanonical,

apocalyptic text, *I Enoch* exhibits a moral imagination strikingly similar to that of the Priestly writer, and in this sense, makes a valuable supplement to the frequent comparisons of the Yahwistic and Priestly creation narratives.

In the book of *I Enoch* the story of the angels and their human wives occurs in chapter 6. But the preceding chapters of *I Enoch* set up the worldview within which this story is to be understood. The first chapter is a hymn that describes the final intervention of God to rescue the righteous and judge the wicked. This is followed in chapters 2-5 by a teaching in the form of a rebuke to sinners. Characteristically, and very importantly, Enoch casts this rebuke in terms of an argument from nature.

“Contemplate all the events in heaven, how the lights in heaven do not change their courses, how each rises and sets in order, each at its proper time, and they do not transgress their law. Consider the earth, and understand from the work which is done upon it...that no work of God changes as it becomes manifest...Contemplate how the trees are covered with green leaves, and bear fruit...all his works serve him and do not change, but as God has decreed, so everything is done....But you have not persevered, nor observed the law of the Lord. But you have transgressed, and have spoken proud and hard words with your unclean mouth against his majesty. You hard of heart! You will not have peace!” (trans. Knibb).<sup>1</sup>

For *I Enoch* God’s will is expressed in fixed categories, clear boundaries, and orderly and harmonious embodiment of those orders in the activities of creatures. The order of nature stands as exemplary for humans. Following this admonition, the story of the angels and the human women serves as the parade example of the disaster that occurs when orders are not

respected and boundaries are transgressed. The authors of Enoch have picked up this story from Genesis 6:1-4, but they have elaborated it and changed its significance substantially.

The story, according to 1 Enoch, begins as follows:

And it came to pass, when the sons of men had increased, that in those days there were born to them fair and beautiful daughters. And the angels, the sons of heaven, saw them and desired them. And they said to one another, Come, let us choose for ourselves wives from the children of men, and let us beget for ourselves children (*1 Enoch* 6:1-2; trans. Knibb).

Here is desire again, setting the plot in motion. But this time it is divine desire for that which pertains to the human. Here, one might say, the apple reaches out for Eve.

The very fact that angels should desire humans is significant. Human existence is not depicted as something deficient. Rather humans have something that even the angels do not have. But what, exactly? Sometimes the story has been read simply in terms of angelic lust. But that does not seem adequate. Although the desire is explicitly erotic, what the angels seek is a normal family life: marriage and children. Twice later in the story there are references to the angels' concern for their children (*1 Enoch* 12:5-6;14:6-7). The trope of angelic desire for human existence is also a topic examined in contemporary popular culture, for example, in Wim Wenders' *Wings of Desire* and its remake as *City of Angels*. Those films take up the motif of angels who desire aspects of human existence, but in a different way than in *1 Enoch*. The films make the point that love and delight in the full sensual world of tastes and colors and touch make mortal life not merely endurable but quite wonderful. Ultimately, however, *Wings of Desire* and

*City of Angels* are sentimental and individualistic. In them the angel's decision affects no one but himself and his wife. These are merely "angelic self-realization" films and have no way to explore what the book of *I Enoch* sees as the dark cosmic consequences of a desire that transgresses boundaries. Desire for the wrong thing--for what is off limits, out of bounds--can literally wreck a world and lead to the ultimate destruction of the desired other.

The warning about transgressive desire in the book of *I Enoch* becomes concrete as the story describes the angels' offspring. As the story was originally told in Genesis 6:1-4, the offspring of the divine beings and the human women were the giants, who are called "the giants of old, the men of renown." That is to say, Gen. 6:1-4 gives a rather positive interpretation to the giants. These were the legendary "great men," the like of whom we do not see in our diminished days. But here the book of *I Enoch* makes its most significant change in the story. According to Enoch, "[The women] became pregnant and bore large giants....These devoured all the toil of men, until men were unable to sustain them. And the giants turned against them in order to devour men. And they began to sin against [i.e., eat] birds, and against animals, and against reptiles and against fish, and they devoured one another's flesh and drank the blood from it" (7:2-5; trans. Knibb). With this passage in Enoch one is a long way from the representation of desire for the other as the eating of a lovely piece of fruit. What the images in the Enoch story suggest is that transgressive desire takes on a life of its own and produces a distorted image of itself. The angels desired human women and the families they might produce together. But this wrongful desire, once carried out, produces only a mocking exaggeration of itself. It produces in the giants appetite without limit, desire without the possibility of satisfaction, desire in which the incorporation of the other becomes an orgy of violence. The horror of it is marked in the fact that the giants do not simply consume vegetable food, which is all that is permitted to humans at

this stage of the world (see Gen 1:29-31), but consume blood--life itself--in all categories of animals, in humans, and finally in a self-destructive cannibalistic self-consumption.

Here are monsters of a familiar type. The mixing of the human and the divine produces something ambiguous, fearful, out of control: something wholly loathsome. One should notice, however, that in Enoch the giants occupy the conceptual space that humans occupy in Genesis. They are the creatures of mixed identity, the product of blurred boundaries. But the giants are regarded with revulsion.

*I Enoch* has yet more to say concerning full horror of the distortions of transgressive desire. The earth complains to God, and through the help of the good angels, God intervenes. A flood will cleanse the earth. The giants who remain after their internecine conflict are killed by drowning (*I Enoch* 10:9-12). But like the monstrous force that it is, transgressive desire survives attempts to kill it. God has to explain the biology of monsters to Enoch. The giants were half human, half divine. The flood can kill their mortal flesh, but not their eternal spirits. Those cannot be killed. Moreover, since the giants were born on earth, it is on earth that the spirits now have their home. God continues, “And now the giants who were born from spirits and flesh<sup>2</sup> will be called evil spirits upon the earth, and on the earth will be their dwelling....And these spirits will rise against the sons of men and against the women because they came out from them” (15:8-9, 12; trans. Knibb).

The divine element of the giants, that which is directly derived from their angelic fathers now embodies sheer malice against humans. Where the angels had erotically desired human women, the residue of their desire has now become its opposite: implacable hostility. But what about the humans? This story of how evil entered the world initially seems to contrast with

Genesis 2-3 in seeing humans as passive victims rather than as initiating agents. Of course, insofar as this story is told as a sequel to the admonition in *1 Enoch* 2-5, it would be warning humans, too, about the dangers of transgressing whatever boundaries are applicable to them. But the story also says some specific things about the way in which human beings come to be implicated in the guilt of the angels.

The humans in this story are not presented simply as victims. Although the description of the angels' initial encounter with the women is very brief, the relationship does not appear to be one of rape. Instead, it seems to be presented more in terms of traditional courtship. The angels can be seen as offering wedding gifts both to the women and to their male relatives. These gifts are the "heavenly secrets" that the angels teach to the humans (*1 Enoch* 7:2; 8:1-4; 9:6-8). So, here, as in Genesis 2-3 the issue of knowledge enters the story. Humans receive knowledge that will make them more like divine beings. And though the humans do not initiate the quest for such knowledge, they appear to be eager recipients. This account is a variant of the common mythic motif of the gift of the arts of civilization by divine beings (for example, Prometheus' gift of fire in Greek mythology). But it turns out to be a deadly gift.

The teaching is described in chapter 8, after the women have become wives of the angels.

"And Azazel taught men to make swords, and daggers, and shields and breastplates. And he showed them metals<sup>3</sup>, and the art of making them: bracelets, and ornaments, and the art of making up the eyes and of beautifying the eyelids, and the most precious and choice stones and all kinds of coloured dyes. And the world was changed. And there was great impiety and much fornication, and they went astray, and all their ways became corrupt. Amezarak taught all those who

cast spells and cut roots, Armaros the release of spells, and Baraqiel astrologers, and Kokabel portents, and Tamiel taught astrology, and Asradel taught the path of the moon” (8:1-4).

Two things deserve note: the consequence of this gift of knowledge to humans is that “the world was changed” (8:2). And in *I Enoch* change is not good. One should note also what was taught: the art of making weapons, the art of personal ornamentation, and the arts of magic and astrology. If one translates the concrete terms into somewhat more abstract categories, these are three of the primary techniques by which desire accomplishes its object: by techniques of force, by techniques of seduction, and by techniques of manipulation. The angels have infected human beings with their own transgressive desires and equipped them with the means to accomplish them, so that the world was changed.

### *Implications for Ethical Reflection*

These two narratives sketch two very different perspectives on the world, what it means to be human, how one might interact with the world, and what the consequences will be. They are, in my opinion, intriguing on their own account. But stories that offer images of ourselves and our relation to the world, bear—at least indirectly—on the way in which we continue to reflect on concrete ethical dilemmas. One must be careful. It is not possible simply to read Genesis or *I Enoch* and then apply it to some modern question. Such stories do not give oracular answers, and it would also be dangerous to read them as allegories of our present situation which only need to be decoded. But such narratives and their various modes of thought, general perspectives, and symbolic images do model a way of thinking about the world. To the extent that one looks through the lenses of these narratives, one will tend to see the relevant aspects of

contemporary problems in a particular way, to set the parameters of the question differently, to choose different starting points and different analogies by means of which to think. Such ways of looking at things do not necessarily dictate specific conclusions, but they do direct the kind of framing perception that guides one's moral reasoning and hence the type of decisions one makes.

To make this claim more vivid, I would like to illustrate with a somewhat whimsical example, crafted in the spirit of the late Steve Allen's television program, *Meeting of the Minds*. What if one imagined Enoch and Eve sitting outside the Starbucks in heaven, arguing over an article in the newspaper concerning genetic engineering. It is a story about the implantation of a fish gene in a tomato plant to make it resistant to freezing weather. But of course more is at stake than codfish and tomatoes. I use this example of genetic modification, especially as it involves cross-species manipulation, since it so clearly raises issues of the nature of the world as given or constructed, the moral and metaphysical implications of changing the world, the nature of human desire and creativity, and so forth.

There is no doubt where the type of moral imagination embodied in *I Enoch* comes out. Enoch speaks a resounding "no." His starting point is an orientation to the character of the world itself:

**Enoch:** "Can you believe this, Eve? Putting fish genes in tomato plants? There is a God-given wisdom already structured into the world of nature that has to be respected. You can't make proper moral decisions by just asking what people want (like a freeze-proof tomato). People's desires don't provide an adequate moral compass because we always want what we don't have. There's no discipline to desire. It just wants what it wants. The only reliable moral compass comes from something that transcends human

beings. Immanuel Kant got it right, Eve: ‘the starry sky above and the moral law within.’ Human beings have to resist the desire to tamper. Tampering breaks things. And a broken world can’t be fixed.”

Eve knows she disagrees with Enoch, though she isn’t quite sure why. It’s just not the way she looks at things.

**Eve:** “Enoch, I don’t think you have a clue as to what it means to be a human being. Desire is not a dirty word. Desire is at the root of human curiosity, human creativity. Humans have a hunger for knowledge, Enoch. To be human is to see the world as full of wonderful things to be explored. Human desire reaches out for new possibilities, things not yet imagined. This is the heart and soul of scientific inquiry. But I’d disagree that desire has no discipline. People aren’t just pure appetite. We don’t just grunt and point: ‘Me want pretty apple.’ We’ve got brains, too. We make choices based on what seems good and what seems bad. Now, I’ll grant you that not every decision humans make is wise. We make some big mistakes—DDT seemed like a good idea at the time—but we face the consequences and make new and better choices.

“One other thing, Enoch. I’ve always admired your environmental sensibilities. But your understanding of the world is so rigid. You see it as some fragile machine that’s going to break at the slightest change. But change is itself part of the world. I see the world is open and adaptive. The world is always ‘under construction,’ and what humans do is part of that construction. Even at the level of genes and chromosomes.”

**Enoch** replies. “Oh, good grief, Eve. A tomato with the soul of a fish is just unnatural.”

**Eve:** “It’s not a soul, Enoch, it’s a gene. But anyway, I don’t think we should fear things just because they are strange, new, ‘unnatural.’ When it comes to that, we are the most ‘unnatural’ being there is. Look, I’m not saying that I think this tomato experiment is a good one. There are all kinds of ecological and social issues to be considered. But in principle, a fish gene in a tomato plant is no more monstrous than is a human being, that cross between ape and angel. Don’t you see the implications of your *way of thinking*, Enoch? You’re so tied up in taxonomies and identities. ‘A place for every thing and everything in its place.’ This whole focus on identities is part of a totalizing epistemology that is a tool of repression. You ought to read some feminist science fiction, Enoch. They’ve transcended the binary opposition of the organic vs. the technological. In their imagery of cyborgs and monstrous women created through boundary transgressions, identities are always partial and contradictory. It’s by thinking the ‘monstrous’ that we deconstruct the definitions that entrap us and ‘crack the matrices of domination.’”

**Enoch** sighs. Ever since Eve read Donna Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto”<sup>4</sup> and declared herself a cyborg feminist they’ve been having this discussion. Eve keeps trying to find a way to re-read her own story subversively. Enoch doesn’t think that it quite works, but if anyone can pull it off, Eve can.

“Look, Eve, I don’t want to get into all that again. What I do want to say is that I can’t believe you have such a naive understanding of desire (or ‘creativity’ as you want to call it) and the law of unintended consequences. You talked a minute ago as though the

results of human creativity remain under our control. But that is not so. Look at the already existing technologies, from nuclear energy to industrialized, pesticide-laced farming. These technologies, born in desire, the offspring of our spirit and material reality, acquire a life of their own. They escape our control, and when they do, they develop voracious appetites, attacking and consuming the environment in unexpected ways. And even when one tries to eliminate them, their toxic ghosts hang around, the inverted image of our original desire, now turned into something that seems full of malice toward us, their human parents.” Growing more and more agitated, Enoch says, “Don’t you see where this leads? Too much tampering with the god-given world, and its very structures will collapse, corrupted beyond redemption. And moral order won’t survive the collapse of nature either. Transgression leads to anarchy, Eve, and the result is an orgy of violence and the betrayal of every human bond. It would take the judgment of God to clean up the mess. And maybe that’s what we need. Call me a pessimist, Eve, but I don’t think we can reign in our out of control technological desires by ourselves. I think nothing short of a global catastrophe can put an end to it. But, maybe, just maybe, out of the ruins there might be a few survivors who would understand that humility and living rightly and harmoniously with the world instead of against it is the only way. Look at the stars; look at the trees. If we lived like them, nature would bring forth its own abundance, and we could live in peace instead of greedy conflict. That’s what people were intended to do.

Eve, momentarily shaken both by the power of Enoch’s vision and his passion, recovers a bit and  
says,

“Look Enoch, I think you’ve been reading too much *bad* science fiction. All this dystopian/utopian, apocalyptic fantasy is simply hysterical anxiety in mythological drag. Nevertheless, I’ll concede you this much. The problem, as I think we both see it, is that people don’t have much of an internal control mechanism. It is really hard for us to say no to ourselves when once we’ve seen a gleaming possibility. I know some of my friends in the scientific and business communities wouldn’t agree with me, but we really do need some limits, limits that come from something that transcends ourselves. But pointing to the ‘laws of nature’ is no good, Enoch. We aren’t stars, we aren’t trees. We’re something different. But I’m not willing to say that apocalypse is the only answer. What’s missing in those approaches is that they don’t take seriously our status as moral agents. Call me naive, but I really think that if human beings have a clear vision of the good, a sense of what it means to be a community of mutual responsibility, that we can commit ourselves voluntarily, bind ourselves to some limits that will protect us against our worst excesses. But I don’t quite know how to envision what that would look like.”

At that moment Eve looks up and sees another friend coming out of

Starbucks. “Oh! Moses! Come over here. There’s something we want to ask you.”

As much as I would love to continue “Eve-s-dropping,” it is necessary to leave them to their conversation. What I have tried to demonstrate, however, is that the stories people tell about who we are as human beings and what the world is like are stories that embody powerful moral imaginations. They are prototype stories that embody distinctive ways of perceiving and thinking. They offer forms of moral imagination that can be drawn upon when encountering new and unfamiliar issues. To the extent that people are formed by such stories, they will try to map the stories onto new issues. For someone whose moral imagination is close to that articulated in what I have called the “priestly” imagination of *I Enoch*, the structures of the world are inviolable, and transgressing natural boundaries would be terribly wrong, fraught with almost unimaginable dangers. For someone who is formed by the exploratory imagination of Eve in the story of Genesis 2-3, the world is always “under construction,” and human curiosity and desire are part of that unfolding. In this exercise of the imagination I have tried to present Enoch and Eve as both representing morally significant positions. The motivating force of this exploration, however, is not to advocate one or the other but to encourage the examination of the shapes of moral imagination as they occur in formative texts of scripture and in other normative sources that inform contemporary ethical reflection. In this enterprise lie new possibilities for the conversation between the Bible and ethics.

<sup>2</sup>Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 46.

<sup>3</sup>Paolo Sacchi, *Jewish Apocalyptic and Its History* (trans. W. J. Short: JSPSup 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 32-71.

<sup>4</sup>Anne Carson, *Eros the Bittersweet* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 30.

<sup>5</sup>Carson, 33.

<sup>6</sup>I examine this text for its general ecological implications in Carol Newsom, “Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2-3,” in N. C. Habel and S. Wurst, *The Earth Story in Genesis*, 68-69.

<sup>7</sup>Baird Callicott, “Genesis and John Muir,” in C. S. Robb and C. J. Casebolt, eds. *Covenant for a New Creation: Ethics, Religion and Public Policy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 123.

<sup>8</sup>Callicott, 123-24.

<sup>9</sup>*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MA, 1976), 1465.

<sup>0</sup>E.g., Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991). The tantalizing ambiguity of the monstrous is analyzed in Timothy Beal, *Religion and Its Monsters* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 193-96.

<sup>1</sup>Michael Knibb, “I Enoch,” in H. D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 204-5.

<sup>2</sup>Reading with one of the Gk ms. See Knibb, 204, n. 13.

<sup>3</sup>Reading with one of the Gk ms. See Knibb, 190, n. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Donna J. Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*.