READING GENESIS CHAPTER THREE

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"ANIMAL STORIES

"Now the snake was more shrewd than all the living-things of the field that YHWH, God, had made. It said to the woman: …" (3.1).

"The snake said to the woman"—this could begin a fable by Aesop. A talking animal would not have been original with him, though. Aesop lived in the late sixth century before the birth of Jesus Christ, scholars say, perhaps a contemporary of Pythagoras. The snake in Genesis Three appeared a thousand years earlier.

Today, the animal stories we find in bookstores are mostly for children; but Aesop, and Plato, in the Myth of Ur, Machiavelli, and Jonathan Swift tell animal stories meant for grown-ups. I think the Garden of Eden story should be told to children. But they will not understand it until they begin to grow up.

An animal story is a sort of parable. How we learn to read a parable, to interpret and understand it, isn't very clear to me. I think it's a little like trying to understand a dream. Dreams encode and distort what happens when we're awake, they scramble our waking experience.

Is reading parables a teachable art? Can just anybody do it? A passage in Kant's first Critique suggests to me that he thought maybe not.

"And thus we find that, whereas understanding is capable of being taught and equipped by rules, the power of judgment is a particular talent that cannot be taught at all but can only be practiced. This is also the reason why the power of judgment is the specific [feature] of so-called mother-wit, for whose lack no school can compensate." Mother-wit, he says in his Anthropology, consists in "possession of the universal and innate rules of the understanding." (B 172, Pluhar, p. 206, at br. n. 26).

Animal stories began, I propose, when the first poet thought of an analogy. "Analogy," from Greek *analogon*, is translated in Euclid's Fifth Book as "proportion."

Greedy as a pig. She watched him like a hawk. He's got horse-sense. She's timid as a mouse. Scared as a rabbit. Busy as a bee. Acted like an ass. Walked on cat's feet.

Iago speaks with a forked tongue (Othello). Thersites looks like a monkey (Plato, Republic, X). A ruler who wants to survive in politics must be able to act in turn like either a lion or a fox (Machiavelli, The Prince). If horses could talk, they would tell us how simply amazed they are at the moral disorder of human families, and at our indiscriminate habits of mating. (Swift, Gulliver's Travels).

The Bible is the oldest book in the West. Its earliest parts come from some time perhaps ten centuries before Homer. Genesis is its first book. What the snake and the woman say to one another is the first conversation in Genesis. As presented by the Bible, it is the first conversation in human history.

It has come to seem strange to me that the Holy Book of two great religions, Judaism and Christianity, should present the history of mankind as having begun with a snake talking to a woman. If this is history it is not history like Herodotus and Thucydides. Who is this snake?

The first animal story ever told is probably not this one. But we can't really know. Never mind. The story of Eve and the serpent *is* the animal story that some ancient rabbi, or several of them, chose to put first in the Hebrew Bible. What that rabbi thought the story meant, and what he aimed to teach by it, is what I'm going to speculate about.

By "Hebrew Bible," I mean the one composed originally in that language, except, I've read somewhere, for three books in Aramaic. This is the Bible of the Jews, the first half of the Bible we study in Sophomore Seminar.

It's the older half. This means that the Garden of Eden story belonged to the ancient Israelites before Christianity appropriated it. And if, as I am surmising, the story was for a long time told and re-told before someone first wrote it down—as seems to have been the case with Homer—then it belonged to bards and story-tellers before the rabbis appropriated it.

"THE SNAKE

"Now the snake was more shrewd than all the living-things of the field that YHWH, God, had made. It said to the woman: …" (3.1).

The snake is not mentioned in the Chapter One Six-Days-Creation account of how all living creatures came into being. He is not mentioned in Adam's naming of the animals in Chapter Two. In Verse one of Chapter Three, which I've just read, he seems to come out of nowhere. His origin is unknown, mysterious. Maybe snakes are with us always.

My translator, Everett Fox, tells me that the Hebrew root of "Eden" is cognate with the word for "pleasure" that Sarah uses in Chapter 18 when she hears that she and Abraham are to have a son. "Avraham and Sara were old, advanced in days, the way of women had ceased for Sara. Sara laughed within herself, saying, After I have become worn, is there to be pleasure for me? And my lord is old!" (vv. 10-12).

So …, Eden is the Pleasure Place, the Land of Pleasure. A well-kept garden is a place of pleasure. But a real garden is likely to harbor snakes. Eden, the first garden, has a snake in the grass.

"[The snake] said to the woman: Even though God said: You are not to eat from any of the trees in the garden …!"

Later in the story, God condemns the snake to walk on his belly. So here, when he speaks to the woman, he must be standing upright. In posture and the ability to speak, he is half-way a man. In shrewdness and cunning, he is a beast of the field; a predator. His question shows his cunning.

The King James translation, in my Westminster Study Edition, renders the question this way: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (3.1). Everett Fox says his version is closer to the sense of the Hebrew:

"Even though God has said: You are not to eat from any of the trees in the garden …!

This version has the form of a rhetorical figure called aposiopesis, which means, in Greek, a becoming silent.

It's what we do when we suddenly break off in the middle of a sentence because we are unable to continue speaking, or as the snake does, because we don't wish to say out loud all of what we're thinking. The snake aims to find directions out by speaking indirectly. He probes the woman's mind with insinuation. He is fishing.

The story does not say how the snake knows God said anything at all to the man or the woman about which trees are available for food. I think this silence does not matter if it doesn't affect what the story is about. Whatever his means and sources, the snake knows enough to catch the prey he's hunting. He knows that hint and innuendo will set the woman's imagination going.

"THE CONVERSATION

The snake diverts the woman's attention to God's motives for the prohibition. Knowing her innocence and inexperience, he touches her child-like readiness to believe. He suspects that, like a child, she has an inclination to believe that what she wants is desirable and good just because she wants it. What she says and does confirms this suspicion.

The snake's art is the one Penelope's father had. Homer calls it "the art of the oath." Sinon, in Virgil's Aeneid, had it too. And Iago and Don Giovanni. The art of ignoble rhetoric, speech intended to mislead.

In Genesis Three, speech and lying appear at the same time. The first conversation is a seduction. It is about eros.

"The woman said to the snake:

From the fruit of the (other) trees in the garden we may eat,

but from the tree that is in the midst of the garden, God has said:

You are not to eat from it, and you are not to touch it,

lest you die."

There are two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil. The Tree of Life is "in the midst of the garden." Where the other tree is the story does not say. (2.9)

Is its location not mentioned because where it is doesn't matter? It could be anywhere, or everywhere. Forbidden trees, or fruit, may be like snakes: where we find one, the other is nearby. No garden, no place of pleasure, is free of snakes.

Maybe Eve and Adam would eventually find their way to it, wherever it is. Eve probably would: she has more curiosity than Adam. She is more adventurous. Whether she wishes to adventure alone is a question.

Would she always offer to share with Adam? Does her desire to share the fruit contribute to her choice to eat it? Is she capable of not sharing, of keeping the fruit for herself? Would it be good for Eve to be alone, on her own?

She confuses the trees. The prohibition specified the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil, but she tells the snake that the prohibition applies to the tree "in the midst of the garden." This is the Tree of Life. Why does she mix them up?

Is she really confused? If the two trees are essentially one, each of them implicates the other. Knowing Good and Evil would be bound up with that immortality that could have been gotten from the Tree of Life.

The woman also mentions a prohibition against touching, but God said nothing about touch. She was not present then, she must have been told the prohibition by the man. Was she paying attention? Or maybe she knows something about touch that he doesn't know.

Our touch *is* quite sensitive. A particle of grit in the spinach, an eye-lash in soup, we detect immediately; a mosquito on our hair, a feather's touch on the arm. Is this the sense of touch the woman has in mind?

In The Prince, Chapter XIX, Machiavelli says: "Men in general judge more by their eyes than by their hands, because seeing is given to everyone, touching to few. Everyone sees how you appear, few touch what you are …." Judge by the hands, he advises, not by the eyes. It is by touch that we find out what others respond or react to.

"The snake said to the woman:

Die, you will not die!

Rather, God knows

that on the day you eat from it, your eyes will be opened

and you will become like gods, knowing good and evil." (vv. 4-5)

What the snake says is not simply wrong, or false. They do not die—not, that is, "on the day" they eat. And their eyes *are* opened. And they do find themselves "knowing good and evil." The snake says God knew all this beforehand, and he is not wrong.

Adam lives 930 years, according to the genealogy in Chapter Five, and after his first three sons, Cain, Abel, and Seth, he "begot (other) sons and daughters" (5.4). Adam lives to see the birth of his descendant in the ninth generation, Lamech, the father of Noah. Noah's great-great-grandfather is Enoch, the first man said to have "walked with God" (5.21, 24).

Adam and Eve did not "walk with God." At the end of the story, they are sent away, driven out of the Garden (3.23, 24), and it is closed permanently. Some things we can do only once.

"The woman saw

that the tree was good for eating

and that it was a delight to the eyes,

and the tree was desirable to contemplate" (v. 6).

Her three motives are listed in a sort of ascent, from the belly to the eyes to the mind. The tree was, first, "good for eating," then it "delighted her eyes," and last she saw it as "desirable to contemplate." The Hebrew that Everett Fox renders as "to contemplate," the Greek translation renders as *katanoesai*, aorist infinitive of the compound of the preposition *kata* and the verb *noeo*.

This may be, if my memory is reliable, the same verb Aristophanes uses in Scene III of *The Clouds* when he has Socrates say, "I tread on air and contemplate the sun." Socrates looks down on the gods from above. If this is the sense of the woman's thought, "desirable to contemplate" could imply prideful ambition.

I believe, though, the verb's range of meanings could include a quite different sort of looking—the way a mother looks down on the face of her nursing first-born. This look can include awe and wonder, perhaps even gratitude and reverence. A looking up by looking down?

God has stocked the Garden with "every type of Tree, desirable to look at and good to eat" (2.9). Whether he contemplates that mankind will have a desire to contemplate, the story does not say. There seems to be no room in the Garden for philosophy or wisdom of the Platonic kind.

The immediate need this verse deals with is insuring that what's attractive is also edible, and what's good for food is also attractive. As a place of pleasure, a

garden must have no beautiful plants that are poisonous or dangerous, like the one we call Venus' fly-trap.

God puts beauty first, nutrition second, but the woman inverts this order. For God, the beautiful has some sort of primacy in his plan for the life of human beings. But the woman's first motive, what urges her from deepest, is food, an appetite she and the man have in common with the animals. Whether the animals are capable of desiring what is beautiful, for its own sake, is a question.

"She took from its fruit and ate

and gave also to her husband beside her,

and he ate" (v. 6).

She took, she ate, she gave. "He ate" is the whole sum of what the man does. The woman is very much in charge here. The man is mousy, he acts like a scared rabbit. He does not speak, does not question, hardly seems even to choose what he does in any responsible way. Was he supposed to guard the woman as God charged him to "watch" the Garden (2.15)? If so, he fails.

The story does not report any conversation between them. If there was conversation, it was without words. Did they speak with their eyes? Touch with their looks?

"SHAME

"The eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew then that they were nude. They sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths" (v. 7), or in the King James translation, "aprons."

What their eyes are "opened" to is that they are nude. How is it "Knowing Good and Evil" to see their nudity? Is nudity "evil"?

What they cover, moved by shame, is their organs of generation. Shame enters the world, comes into our human experience, when the generative parts of the body, the "private" parts, are for the first time seen to need concealment.

Their nudity was not always shameful. "Now the two of them, the human and his wife, were nude, yet they were not ashamed." This is the last verse of Chapter Two, right before the snake appears, out of nowhere, in the first verse of Chapter Three. Before they ate the forbidden fruit, the man and the woman did not see their organs of generation as shameful, even though they were visible.

Nudity may not be inherently shameful. A year-old boy and girl playing on the seashore without any clothes on would not feel shame. They probably would not pay much attention at all to their differences.

Of course this will change in the second and third decades of life. That is when we become, involuntarily, capable of generation. We start noticing the other, and seeking a mate, or partner, or friend for the long term.

Even the nudity incident to the act of generation may not be in itself shameful. A divine command, Be fruitful and multiply, cannot be understood to require a shameful act. (Cf. 26.6-9).

If conjugal coupling can be without shame, then what Eve and Adam did must have been somehow not in compliance with the command of fruitfulness. Perhaps they should have asked permission. Not having permission, they were not in all respects ready to do what they did. Or the way in which they were ready was not the only way in which they should have been ready.

"Now they heard the sound of YHWH, God, (who was) walking about in the garden at the breezy-time of the day. And the human and his wife hid themselves from the face of YHWH, God, amid the trees of the garden. YHWH, God, called to the human and said to him: Where are you? He said: I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid, because I am nude, and so I hid myself." (3.8-10).

They not only cover their organs of generation, they also try to hid their whole body. They do not understand that God can see everything, can see what they are trying to hide, both their private parts and their public parts. Our public parts are our faces and bodies, that is, our posture, the way we hold ourselves.

In *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals*, Darwin presents persuasive evidence and argument that there is a posture which signifies shame. And he says we blush only on skin that is exposed. This is most commonly the face. That the man and the woman try to hide what cannot be hidden reveals them as not knowing where they are. They think, or wish, they were hidden. They do not understand that what they have done cannot be hidden.

Does the Knowing of Good and Evil consist in discovering that when we have done what we ought not to have done, we have no place to hide? The realization that our most private selves are utterly exposed? That we are naked to the world?

God asks, "Where are you?," and the man answers, I heard you, I was afraid, I hid myself. His shame shows in his effort to cover up. Hiding, covering-up, is impelled by a fear of being seen, the fear that another will see what we wish to keep out of sight.

"Who told you that you were nude? From the tree about which I command you not to eat, have you eaten?"

No one "told" the man he was nude. He saw this for himself, after eating the fruit. "They knew then that they were naked" (3.7). "They knew then" means "they realized." What they realized was that by their disobedience, they themselves infected with incurable shame their first conjugal coupling, which might otherwise have been in joyous compliance with God's command, if they had waited to be ready, in every respect, to do what they did.

God asks, have you eaten from the forbidden tree? The man answers, "The woman whom you gave to be beside me, she gave me from the tree, and so I ate" (3.12). His answer reveals how the man was not ready to do what he did. He is not ready to accept responsibility.

The command was given to him, not to the woman. As the intermediary between God and the woman, he should have accurately and forcefully conveyed the terms of the prohibition, and guarded each of them against violating it. He neglected his duty to himself and to her, and did nothing. Tempted, he wilted. Now he evades his responsibility by putting blame on her.

"THE WOMAN

The man comes into the world, and the woman then comes into his life, in Chapter Two. "YHWH, God, formed the human, of dust from the soil, he blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living being" (2.7). In the King James translation, "man became a living soul." In the Septuagint, the Greek translation, man becomes, a living, an animate, *psuche*, soul; in English, "psyche."

God places the man in the garden "to work it and to watch it" (2.15) and gives him this command: "From every (other) tree of the garden you may eat, yes, eat, but from the Tree of the Knowing of Good and Evil—you are not to eat from it, for on the day that you eat from it, you must die, yes, die" (2.16-17).

Immediately after giving this command, God says "It is not good for the human to be alone, I will make him a helper corresponding to him" (2.18). In the King James translation, "I will make him a help meet for him." "Meet," "m-e-e-t," here means "fit," in the sense "apt" or "proper" or "suitable." Other translations are "helper fit for him" (RVS), "fitting helper" (Tanakh), and "partner" (NEB).

What God means when he says "It is not good that the man should be alone" (KJV), the story does not say. Nor does the story say what God means by "not good."

Five things are called "good" in the Six Days Creation story in Chapter One: light (v. 4); the separation of dry land and seas (v. 10); the ruling of day and night by the sun and moon, which separate day-light and darkness (vv. 16-18); the swarming of the waters with fish and the air with birds (vv. 20-21); and the herd-animals, wildlife, and crawling things of the soil (vv. 24-25).

In sum, the good things are separations, ruling, and fecundity, fertility.

One thing is said to be "exceedingly good." This occurs on the sixth day, as "God saw all that he had made" (1.31). The parts are "good," but the created and well-arranged whole is "very good" (KJV), goodest of all.

Mankind, "humankind" in the Fox translation I am usually quoting, is not said to be "good." This silence may suggest that, in the beginning, it is an open question whether man is "good," or "good" without qualification. In Eden, it's too early to tell, he hasn't done anything yet, except listen to God's command, and we know from what happens later that he didn't understand it fully. If he had, he would not have disobeyed it, and would have restrained his wife from doing so, for her own good.

In Genesis, man's work is to rule: "God said: Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness! Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the heavens, animals, all the earth, and all crawling things that crawl about upon the earth!" (1.26).

God knows that male without female, man without woman, cannot comply with the command he has given to both animals and human beings, "Bear fruit and be many," or "Be fruitful, and multiply" (KJV) (1.22, 28). Heterosexual pairing as the means of procreating offspring is taken for granted as the natural pattern. "Not good" for the man to be without a woman means, at the very least, that man alone cannot be fruitful. What about woman alone?

Both human beings and animals generate offspring. But in Genesis Chapter One, only man is a ruler; animals are ruled. Man, mankind, is to have dominion over not only the animals but "all the earth." And after they disobey, man is to rule over woman (3.16). Ruling requires some sort of separation and distance between the one ruling and the one being ruled. (See 1.16-18).

If our proper work is to rule the animals and "all the earth," it is "not good" that any of us should live individually in isolation. Alone, we have nothing to rule. We are, we are meant to be, not only social (which some animals also are), but also political animals, to live under rule. A man living in isolation can live only the life of a brute. Brutes rule by violence, not speech.

Rule—the activity that defines political life—is learned in the family, where according to Genesis, the man is to rule the woman. What qualifies the man for this rule, how he is to exercise his power, the story does not spell out. Adam fails the test.

But so does Eve. God asks her, "What is this that you have done?," and she says, "The snake enticed me, and so I ate" (3.13). She, too, is not ready to accept moral responsibility for the consequences of what she does and says. Man alone is "not good." Neither were the first man and the first woman together.

There is more, much more, to examine in the Eden story. But in order to change and enlarge our perspective, I am going to being again, in a new place.

"ECHOES

In the Bible we read in Seminar, the second half, composed in Greek, begins with a genealogy. "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Mt. 1.1). In this way, the Hebrew and Greek halves of the Bible are here joined. Abraham whose story begins in Genesis, Chapter 12, is here said to be also the ancestor of Christianity's eponym, Jesus, the man called the Christ, the anointed one, Messiah, Son of God.

In Genesis, a genealogy in Chapter 5 joins Adam to Noah; another, in Chapter 11, joins Noah's son, Shem, to Abram (vv. 10-15), later re-named Abraham. Thus the genealogy that begins the Gospel of Matthew, the first book of the Greek Bible, extends the genealogies in Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible. All parts of the whole connect with one another.

Two stories about David, ancient Israel's greatest king, shed light, I think, on Genesis Three. They are the stories about David and Goliath, and about David and Bathsheba. In the first, David is a young man; in the second, an aging king. Together, they raise a question about how spiritedness and eros are related.

In First Samuel Chapter 17, David affirms his readiness to face the Philistine giant, Goliath, without armor and only his own weapon, a slingshot. He is a mere stripling youth, with no experience of war.

He tells King Saul, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: And I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him" (vv. 34-35).

Keep in mind that what David was guarding was sheep, and what he rescued was a lamb.

Years later, David is himself now king. "And it came to pass, … at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David … tarried still at Jerusalem" (II Sam. 11.1, King James trans.). "And … in an eveningtide, [he] arose from off his bed, and walked upon the roof of the king's house: and from the roof he saw a woman washing herself; and the woman was very beautiful to look upon. And David sent …and took her" (vv. 2-4). Like Eve, he takes what he sees as attractive.

David is not where a warrior-king belongs, with his army. He is in the wrong place. If God had asked him, Where are you?, what would David have said?

In consequence of being in the wrong place, he sees a woman who is uncovered, something he should not see, and would not have, if he had been where he belonged. But he is growing old. By taking something beautiful that does not belong to him, is he trying to solace his fear of death?

"The woman was beautiful and David took her" echoes Genesis, Chapter 6, which comes after the Garden of Eden story, and immediately precedes the story of Noah and the flood. "And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (vv. 1-2). "Saw that they were fair, and took them."

David orders Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, put in the front lines of battle, where he is killed. Nathan the prophet then tells David a parable. In the same city, there lived a rich man with "exceeding many flocks and herds," and a poor man who "had nothing save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up … with his children … and was unto him as a daughter." To provide a hospitable meal for a passing stranger, the rich man takes the poor man's lamb.

Hearing this story, "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die: And he shall restore the lamb four fourfold because … he had no pity." And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man."

David sees the injustice, but he doesn't see who did it. He does not see himself in the story. He does not know how to hear a parable.

Is it Kant's mother-wit that he lacks? He sees the universal, the rich man did an injustice, but he does not have the rule that shows how the particular fits under the universal. He is the particular, he and the rich man are analogues, but he does not see the proportions between the parable and his own actions, until Nathan says, "Thou art the man." What is it that blinds him?

King David may be like us when we read the *Meno* and don't see how we are stuck in the mud of our unexamined opinions; or when we can see and draw on the blackboard with ease the shapes in Euclid but can't see the shapes and motions in the sky unless we go to the planetarium or YouTube.

It's simply true, and we all know it, that some of us cannot rotate three-dimensional shapes in our heads—and may never learn to, however hard we try. Mother-wit is not equally distributed. Do we need to know geometry in order to understand a parable?

Nathan's parable says this: the greatest king of ancient Israel, as a youth, showed in defending his father's flock the courage of a lion, but in his old age, he sees someone else's lamb as fair prey. (II Sam.11 et seq.).

Now suppose Genesis Three is a parable. Are we in the story?

"READING PARABLES

The Bible is the oldest book in the West. Its oldest parts, Genesis 1-11, tell stories from a time long before Homer and Plato. Partly because it is so old, learning how to read it is a problem.

There is not enough Seminar time for us to read all of it. We don't read, in particular, the last book. This, in my King James study edition is titled, "The Revelation to John."

We could, though, if we took a mind to, page through the whole, the same way we might page through Euclid's *Elements* or Zuckerkandl's *Sense of Music*. We can also use study aids: the Table of Contents, the index, the topics in a selective concordance, if our text has any of these.

Paging through Revelation, I found this: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (2.7). I think that "overcometh" means "resists the snake." Revelation refers back to Genesis, the last book to the first book, the end to the beginning. Intense meditation on Alpha leads to Omega (Rev. 1.8).

As in Genesis, there are animal stories in Revelation. Chapter 2 of Revelation recalls Balaam's ass, another talking animal. This story is told in the Book of Numbers, Chapter 21. The ass justly reproaches a wrong by his master, unlike the snake, who seduces someone to act wrongly. Acting like Balaam's ass is not stupid.

Revelation as a whole reports a vision that John, its author, had. The vision includes four horses. The rider of the white one holds a bow and a crown (v. 2). The rider of the red one has the "power to take peace from the earth" (v. 4). The rider of the black horse holds a pair of balances (v. 5). The rider of the pale horse has the power "to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death" (v. 7).

The four horses are two pairs: white and black, red and pale. Pale horse kills, red destroys peace. The black and white build, they make to grow. The pair of balances are the scales of justice; bow and crown are kingly rule, political power exercised rightly.

Which pair of riders will prevail in the world? Which are prevailing right now, in our own time? Which prevail in us, in our own souls (cf. Plato, *Phaedrus*)?

Looking inward, do we behold stable equilibrium or conflict? If we are at war with ourselves, how much of the fight involves eating and eros? Socrates' "lie in the soul" may refer to a struggle already recognized, long before him, by the ancient rabbis, and before them, by the story-teller whose tale or parable they preserved in Genesis Three.

An animal story is a sort of parable. The parable is Jesus' characteristic mode of speech. "All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying 'I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world" (Mt. 13.34-35).

Jesus is drawing on Psalm 78. "Give ear, O my people, to my law: Incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, And our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children ..." (vv. 1-4).

These verses echo another text in the Hebrew Bible's so-called "Wisdom Books." "A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; And a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels: To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; The words of the wise, and their dark sayings. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: But fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1.5-7).

Eve may have desired wisdom. But she did not seek instruction. If she had, her grandmother might have offered her some cautionary counsel.

The Book of Proverbs is not theology of the kind that the Garden of Eden story has been buried under. It is the book of practical wisdom, of common sense, of morals and right conduct in the affairs of our ordinary lives, the distillate of sayings and stories that mothers and fathers, grand-fathers and grand-mothers, tell their children and their children's children. "A cat that jumps on a hot stove won't do it again; he won't even jump on a cold one" (Mark Twain?).

By tradition, the Book of Psalms is attributed to David, ancient Israel's greatest king, and the Book of Proverbs to Solomon, his son by Bathsheba. Solomon rules ancient Israel at the height of its glory, power, and expanse, right before it began to decline and eventually disappear, destroyed by the Assyrians, its people scattered for two thousand years, until their return to Palestine in 1948, when modern Israel was established.

On the record given in the Bible, David and Solomon were Israel's most erotic rulers. They are joined as father and son through Bathsheba, she who was "very beautiful to look upon," whom David saw naked because he was in a place where he should not have been (II Sam. 11.2). Did the powerful erotic natures of these two rulers contribute more to building Israel up, or more to its falling apart?

In Lincoln's 1827 speech, "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions," he identifies as the most likely threat to the long-term stability and prosperity of the then still-new United States of America, the men of the tribe of the lion and the eagle. These restless men—today we can also see women like them—are always busy doing something. They don't care whether they build or destroy, as long as they are bustling about, hungry to be seen, admired for their dynamism and potency.

Solomon, the love-child sprung from David's adultery, is reported to have "exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom" (I Kgs. 10.23). But to build his palace, he expends his riches over thirteen years, and it takes only seven to build Israel's temple (Id., 6.38, 7.1). If my reading of the measurements is correct, the temple is smaller.

His famous wisdom is exemplified in the unforgettable story where he commands a baby to be divided between the two harlots who each claimed to be its mother. He seems to know something about what mothers love most. But he has been wildly indiscriminate in his mating, and in making mothers. Just eight chapters later, we read that he "loved many strange women, "clave to them in love," and had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines (Id., 11.1-3).

In his dotage, Solomon becomes like his father. Both of them lose sight of God's providential care for them, and seek solace in beautiful young bodies, trying not to see what is ugly in themselves. The weaknesses that go with growing old expose in their souls the bestial and predatory face of eros.

Solomon and David forget the first cause of their power and riches. They forget what is implicit in the command to be fruitful and multiply. This is the sacramental aspect of eros—Heavenly Aphrodite (see Plato, *Symposium*), which used to be called "pro-creation."

Procreation happens in front of God's face, not behind his back. It is an imitation of His creative activity in Genesis One. Although the act is private, it is not shameful. Its consequence, a new life, does not need to be covered up. The new mother's blush bespeaks joy, not shame.

Adam and Eve were not ready for procreation, for birth; generation; family. In Genesis Three, "Eve" is the woman's third and final name. The Everett Fox

translation tells me that the Hebrew, Haava, means "Life-giver." Eden, the pleasure place, is the place for giving life.

The damning and conclusive evidence of their unreadiness is their first-born son, Cain. He is the first brother-killer, yet also the founder of cities (4.17). But that's another story."

NOTE TO THE READER: This text was originally composed to be spoken, not read. In delivery, some things in this typescript were omitted, and some things not in this typescript were added; both sorts of changes were made ad libitum, in the moment. In addition, the text in this typescript has been edited, afterwards, with readers (vs. hearers) in mind. Consequently, the audio recording and this typescript differ in some particulars. None of these differences affect the substance of the argument, however.