

Sacred Text, Secular Times:
The Hebrew Bible in the
Modern World

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Center for the Study of
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Creighton University Press
Omaha, Nebraska
2000



Creation Founded in Love:
Breaking Rhetorical Expectations in
Genesis 1:1-2:3¹

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Genesis 1:1-2:3 is a paradigmatic text. Here we find a portrayal of God's founding creative act "in the beginning," at the outset of the biblical canon, as the preface or overture to the entirety of Scripture. This placement alone would require those who take the Bible as normative to treat this portrayal as paradigmatic for the character of the God disclosed in the rest of the Bible.

But, beyond its canonical placement, the text is paradigmatic in another sense, since it plainly asserts in 1:26-27 that humanity is created to be God's "image" (*tzelem*) and "likeness" (*d'mût*). Although the meaning of this assertion has been widely disputed over the millennia, it suggests minimally that the human vocation is somehow modelled on the nature and actions of the God rhetorically portrayed in Genesis 1.²

But Genesis 1 is paradigmatic in yet a third sense, in terms of the impact it has had historically on Western civilization. Even before modern times, this text has had a significant role in shaping Jewish and Christian understandings of God as Creator and the world as an ordered universe subject to the Creator's will. Indeed, many historians argue that it was the worldview embodied in the Genesis 1 creation story which shaped the development of modern western science.³ With the onset of modernity in sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, Genesis 1 became a crucial text for those involved in articulating the growing consciousness of progress and the scientific conquest of nature. Thus the philosopher Francis Bacon (who did more than anyone else singlehandedly to popularize the growing scientific worldview in his native England) utilized the notion of humanity made in

God's image with a mandate to have dominion over the animals and subdue the earth (Genesis 1:26-28) as explicit legitimation for the scientific project.⁴

Today, in a context many have designated "postmodern," when the ideals and achievements of modernity are being subjected to serious critique, the Baconian notion of a divinely ordained human conquest of nature is held in deep suspicion. Not only that, but the larger background picture of God's relation to the created order as portrayed in Genesis 1 is less and less believed (and often openly questioned). But this should come as no surprise. Paradigms are "pharmacological," to use a phrase derived from Jacques Derrida's commentary on Plato's *Phaedrus*. Like the value of writing, which Socrates compares to a "drug" (*pharmakon*) in the *Phaedrus*, the Genesis 1 creation story (and the understanding of God, world, and humanity contained therein) may function as either remedy or poison.⁵ While clearly paradigmatic, the biblical text may, in principle, be either positive or negative in its influence. And significant ethical objections have recently been raised against Genesis 1. In what follows, I cite two broad sets of objections to the text. While both sets of objections constitute important ethical challenges which should not be ignored, neither is based on a careful reading of the biblical text. It will thus be my task to address these objections by a close rhetorical reading of Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a coherent literary unit.

CREATION AS A VIOLENT ACT

One of the most basic challenges to the normative value of Genesis 1 is Catherine Keller's important book, *From a Broken Web*, in which she claims to discern a creation-by-combat theme in the text.⁶ Even before she examines Genesis 1 specifically, however, Keller reads the traditional conception of the God-creation relationship in Judaism and Christianity as essentially patriarchal, encoding the "separable," heroic male ego as the divine element in a religious worldview. Noting that women are often associated with nature and matter in Western history (hence the *double entendre* of "matrix"), she argues that the traditional model of God's transcendent, sovereign relationship to the world serves to legitimate male/God domination of female/nature.⁷

But Keller goes considerably further than that general indictment. Analyzing the oppressive patriarchal social structures of ancient Greece and Mesopotamia, she claims to find their ideological roots in paradigmatic Greek and Mesopotamian myths of a heroic male god's primordial slaying and dismemberment of a female monster (whether Greek Medusa or Babylonian

Tiamat, to give two of the most famous examples). Keller then posits a similar (though more submerged) *Chaoskampf* theme in the Genesis text and claims this as the chief paradigmatic legitimation of patriarchy in both Judaism and Christianity.⁸

Keller's analysis here draws on Herman Gunkel's classic 1895 book, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit*, which compared Genesis 1 with the Babylonian creation story known as the *Enuma Elish* (then only recently discovered in 1873).⁹ Among the similarities between the two texts, Gunkel noted the etymological relationship between *t'hôm* (the Hebrew word in Genesis 1:2 for the "deep," the primordial ocean over which God's Spirit moves) and *ti' amat* (an Akkadian word meaning "ocean" or "sea," which functions as the name of the divinized primordial ocean, also portrayed as a sea monster, in the *Enuma Elish*).¹⁰ Beyond the etymological connection (and feminine gender) of both words, Gunkel pointed out the remarkable thematic similarity of Marduk's mode of creating in the *Enuma Elish* with that of the biblical God in Genesis 1. Whereas Marduk (in order to gain ascendancy as head of the most recent generation of gods in the Babylonian pantheon) conquers Tiamat (the new pantheon's primordial enemy and leader of the olden gods) and splits her dead carcass in half in order to construct heaven and earth, two of God's creative acts in Genesis 1 involve separating or dividing the waters (on both the second and third days of creation).¹¹

The presence, thus, of a primordial watery soup or ocean which is separated and bounded to produce the differentiation of a complex world (along with a number of other parallels) has caused many biblical scholars over the years to view Genesis 1 as influenced by the ideas of the *Enuma Elish* (if not by the text itself). Indeed, the widespread scholarly opinion that Genesis 1 originated in priestly circles during the Babylonian exile lends credence to the notion of *some* sort of relationship between Genesis 1 and the Babylonian text. Yet scholars have disagreed about the precise nature of the relationship between the two. Many since Gunkel have viewed Genesis 1 as merely a reflex of the *Enuma Elish*, while as others, more recently, have understood the biblical text to intentionally polemicize against the *Enuma Elish*. A few even question the notion of any relationship and posit instead Egyptian or Ugaritic parallels for Genesis 1.¹²

Keller clearly opts for the first of these positions.¹³ She admits that on a "surface" reading the Genesis text seems to breathe quite a different atmosphere from the Babylonian combat myth and is characterized not by violence, but by "austere imagery."¹⁴ Yet, drawing on depth psychological

categories, she claims to “see a subtle belligerence at work behind the serene transcendence of the priestly scenario” and goes so far as to suggest that “the brutal cosmocrat Marduk bequeaths his patrimony to the Hebrew creator.”¹⁵ “Huge pieces of history begin to fall into place: it is the heroic-matricidal impulse that provides the common denominator of the misogyny of Greece and of the Near and Middle East.”¹⁶

The relevant point for our purposes is that Keller reads Genesis 1 in accordance with the rhetorical expectations of the *Enuma Elish*. That is, because of similarities between the two texts, she simply assumes Genesis 1 harbors a notion of creation founded in violence.¹⁷ This portrayal of God as divine Warrior subjugating primordial chaos (personified as feminine) has, she argues, contributed historically (and continues to contribute) to the legitimization of violence and oppression, especially against women, in cultures influenced by the Bible.

Whereas Keller may be influenced by Gunkel’s work on the relationship between the biblical and Babylonian texts, her evaluation of the ethical implications of the combat myth draws on the analysis of Paul Ricoeur in his celebrated book, *The Symbolism of Evil*. Ricoeur argues — correctly, I believe — that the *Enuma Elish* paradigmatically legitimated a theology of holy war, where the Babylonian king represented Marduk in vanquishing Babylon’s enemies as historical embodiments of the primal chaos monster.¹⁸ Ricoeur explains:

It will be seen that human violence is thus justified by the primordial violence. Creation is a victory over an Enemy older than the creator; that Enemy, immanent in the divine, will be represented in history by all the enemies whom the king in his turn, as servant of the god, will have as his mission to destroy. Thus Violence is inscribed in the origin of things, in the principle that establishes while it destroys.¹⁹

While utilizing Ricoeur’s insight into the connection between a violent myth of origins and continuing historical violence, Keller critiques Ricoeur for conveniently ignoring “that the primordial enemy is a woman and that the cosmos established by her destruction is not accidentally a patriarchy.”²⁰

Catherine Keller represents a particularly important feminist voice today. Her indictment of the biblical text is not at all idiosyncratic, but is rooted in a reputable tradition of biblical scholarship that is attuned to the ancient Near Eastern theme of the divine conquest of primordial “watery” evil as the basis for establishing cosmic order. This indictment is also rooted in an

undeniable history of women’s experience of suffering within patriarchal religious traditions, and must therefore be taken with utmost seriousness.²¹ In the end, however, I believe that Keller’s suspicious reading of Genesis 1 is rhetorically unwarranted. There are, in fact, three crucial dimensions of the Genesis 1 creation account that directly contradict the *Chaoskampf* theme.

THE ABSENCE OF THE COMBAT MYTH IN GENESIS 1

The first is the role given to *’ehôm*, the primordial ocean in Genesis 1:2, and to *hammayim*, “the waters” (on the second and third days of creation), and especially the status of *hattannînim hagg’dolîm*, “the great beasts” of the sea in verse 21. The deep in Genesis 1 is just that — water. It is neither divine nor demonic. It is no threat and so God does not need to fight it,²² though God does separate or divide the waters for various cosmic structures to emerge (a theme typically found in Sumerian creation myths, with no reference whatsoever to combat).²³ Thus George Barton (writing even before Herman Gunkel) notes that, despite all the similarities between the *Enuma Elish* and Genesis 1, “The waters in the Hebrew narrative are not in conflict with God during the creative process, but are gently brooded over by the *rûa* and easily influenced by it.”²⁴

But not only are the waters thoroughly demythologized in Genesis 1, so are the sea monsters. Although *tannîn* (or the plural *tannînim*) in biblical poetic texts is often translated “dragon” (or “dragons”)²⁵ since the word can stand in apposition (as a roughly parallel term) to Rahab the sea monster (as in Isaiah 51:19 or Psalm 89:11 [Eng 89:10]) or to Leviathan the many-headed twisting sea serpent (as in Isaiah 27:1 or Psalm 74:13-14), both of whom are pictured as YHWH’s adversaries,²⁶ this is certainly not the meaning of the term in Genesis 1. On the contrary, here the *tannînim* are, to use Gunkel’s words, “transformed into a remarkable sort of fish, which is to be included among other created beings.”²⁷ In Genesis 1 even the dragons are part of God’s peaceable kingdom. Thus Psalm 104, a creation psalm with many affinities to Genesis 1, says that YHWH formed Leviathan to “sport” with (Psalm 104:26). As Jon Levenson puts it, the feared primordial sea monster of ancient Near Eastern mythology is the biblical God’s “rubber ducky”!²⁸

The second dimension of the Genesis text which clearly distinguishes it from creation-by-combat is the decided ease with which God creates, in contrast to Marduk’s bloody struggle against a primordial enemy. This ease is suggested by the immediate and unproblematic response of creatures to God’s commanding fiats. The typical pattern of divine command (for

example, "let there be light" or "let the waters be separated") followed by an execution report ("and there was light," or "and it was so") pictures God as encountering no resistance in creating the world. God commands and creation obeys his every word. To put it differently, God rules willing subjects, who do not have to be coerced or subdued to his will.

Indeed, this is a ruler who does not command, so much as invite creatures to respond to his will. This invitational character of God's creative fiat is indicated by the fact that they are not technically imperatives at all, but jussives (which have no exact counterpart in English). As Eugene Roop explains, the force of the Hebrew jussive can range "from the very strong (almost a command) to the very soft (almost a wish)" and "always possesses a voluntary element."²⁹ Whether we read these jussives rhetorically as God's commands (to which there is no resistance), on analogy with the sovereign decrees of a king, or, following Walter Brueggemann, as God's gracious "summons" or "permission" for creatures to exist,³⁰ we are certainly very far removed from the *Chaokampf* motif. In Roop's words: "Creation comes by divine direction, not by a dictator's demand."³¹ The ease of creation — indicated both by the jussives and by the immediate compliance of creatures — is a prominent rhetorical feature of Genesis 1, reflected even in the gentle, repetitive cadences of the text, which progressively builds to a climax, but unlike a genuine narrative contains not a trace of plot tension or resolution (that is, there is no evil to be resisted or overcome).

The third rhetorical indicator which differentiates Genesis 1 from the combat myth is God's evaluation of each stage of the creative process as "good" (*tób*) and in verse 31 of the entire finished product as "very good" (*tób m'od*). The word *tób* has here at least a twofold connotation, aesthetic and ethical. The cosmos is thus "good" in two senses: it is both pleasing to God, as a beautiful, well-constructed world, and it is evaluated positively since it enacts God's will (and is not recalcitrant or rebellious).³² On this point, nothing could be further removed from the *Enuma Elish*, which is filled with bloody battles between the gods (culminating in Marduk's dismembering of Tiamat). The prominence of the creation-by-combat theme in the *Enuma Elish* represents primal evil as a constitutive dimension of the cosmos, which has always to be violently repressed that it might not overwhelm the fragile cosmic order imposed by the gods.

If a theology of holy war (with disastrous implications for human oppression) grows naturally out of the worldview exemplified by the *Enuma Elish* (that is, evil is primordial chaos, while goodness, represented by cosmic order, is later, founded by the vanquishing of chaos), it becomes evident that

a creation which is originally "very good" would sustain an entirely different sort of historical action.³³

This means that one of Keller's assumptions is simply wrong. There is no creation-by-combat in Genesis 1, so it cannot (legitimately) function as a paradigmatic model of divine/male violence against women. Even Gunkel, upon whom Keller is dependent and who certainly *did* portray both Genesis 1 and the *Enuma Elish* as different versions of one basic Semitic combat myth (a questionable notion at best),³⁴ nevertheless described Genesis 1 as an essentially *faded* version of the myth, one which had been fully demythologized and transformed in accordance with Israel's monotheistic faith.³⁵ Today, it is even common for interpreters of Genesis 1 to understand the creation story as intentionally polemicizing against either ancient Near Eastern theological and cosmogonic ideas in general or specifically against those ideas found in the *Enuma Elish*.³⁶ Although there is some debate as to whether the text is intentionally polemical (I believe it is),³⁷ it is now widely agreed among biblical scholars that Genesis 1 embodies a quite distinctive understanding of divine creative power when compared with the *Enuma Elish*.³⁸ Minimally, we could say that the text breaks with the rhetorical expectations of ancient (particularly, Babylonian) readers regarding the nature of divine creative power.

Even John Day, who rejects a Babylonian background for Genesis 1 and posits instead the influence of Ugaritic ideas for the undeniable presence of the combat myth in the Bible, does not find that myth in Genesis 1.³⁹ In contrast to a primordial battle, creation in Genesis 1 is simply, in his own words, "a job of work."⁴⁰ God is pictured here not as warrior, but as craftsman or artisan. Or, in Jon Levenson's terms, which he applies to both Genesis 1 and Psalm 104, this is "creation without opposition."⁴¹ And if you read Levenson's extraordinary book, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, you would realize what a concession this statement is, for Levenson (like Day) finds creation-by-combat in many poetic texts of the Hebrew Bible (in considerably more texts than I would admit), but goes on to say of Genesis 1 that this creation story (without opposition) "now serves as the overture to the entire Bible, dramatically relativizing the other cosmogonies."⁴² That is, its canonical placement makes its portrayal of God's founding creative act paradigmatic in a way that the other cosmogonies are not.

CREATION AS THE IMPOSITION OF TRANSCENDENT WILL

But Catherine Keller is not the only recent voice raising ethical objections to

Genesis 1. As a parallel to Keller's claim that patriarchy and the systemic oppression of women may be traced back to the Genesis text, we find the widespread contemporary notion that Genesis 1 is the ultimate root of the environmental crisis. The popularity of this claim stems primarily from the famous 1967 article of Christian historian Lynn White, Jr., titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."⁴³ Similar critiques have, however, been widely proposed, most notably by historian Arnold Toynbee, Buddhist philosopher Daisetz T. Suzuki, cultural critic Theodore Roszak, and scientists Ian MacHarg and David Suzuki (among many others).⁴⁴ It has now become popular wisdom to make the historical claim that the modern environmental crisis, which is the direct result of the exploitative stance toward nature characteristic of modern Western science, can be traced back to the culture of Western Christianity in which modern science arose. This culture, notes White, was informed paradigmatically by the creation story in Genesis 1.

White (and those who follow him) do not typically appeal to the presence of the combat myth in Genesis 1 in marshalling their critique. There are, however, two dimensions of the critique that are especially relevant for our consideration. First, White and company claim that "nature" (the nonhuman creation) is devalued and desecralized as an inert object, related to God only extrinsically in the Bible (and especially in Genesis 1), which thus makes it available for human manipulation and exploitation. According to White, the biblical worldview not only understood God as absolutely transcendent, but effectively exorcised all spiritual or divine powers from the natural realm, with the result that "the old inhibitions to the exploitation of nature crumbled."⁴⁵ Thus Ronald Reagan, then governor of California, is cited by White as a latter-day inheritor of this worldview, when he reduces nature to mere physical facticity in his famous comment: "when you've seen one redwood tree, you've seen them all."⁴⁶

Secondly, White claims that this reductive "denaturing" of creation is compounded by the creation of humans in the "image" and "likeness" of God, granted a mandate of limitless dominion over the nonhuman creatures, charged to subdue the earth in God's name. Thus humans "share, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature," says White, and the biblical creation account teaches that "no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes."⁴⁷ Together, this picture of a desecralized cosmos, a transcendent God, and an elevated human status reveals a hierarchical dualism of God and humans on the one side and nature on the other, thus legitimating human coercive domination of nature, in imitation of God's primordial coercive relation to the natural world.⁴⁸ What

is perhaps most crucial for our discussion is that God's extrinsic, over-against relationship to the world (a relationship characterized by the unilateral exercise of absolute power over, on God's part) gives humans (in the divine image) license to appropriate and exploit the world as the "masters and possessors of nature" (to use René Descartes' famous phrase).⁴⁹

This ecological critique is combined with feminist concerns about the traditional picture of God in the writings of Sallie McFague. In her widely read book, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age*, McFague utilizes a nuanced version of the ecological critique to call into question the model of God's sovereign relationship to the world which is presupposed in the Genesis text.⁵⁰ Admitting (perhaps with an eye to White) that it is "simplistic to blame the Judeo-Christian tradition for the ecological crisis, as some have done, on the grounds that Genesis instructs human beings to have 'dominion' over nature,"⁵¹ McFague nevertheless indicts what she describes as "royalist, triumphalist images for God — God as king, lord, ruler, patriarch" — that is, the classical Jewish and Christian "monarchical" model of divine transcendence and sovereignty over the cosmos.⁵²

McFague indicts such images because she understands this model of God to have functioned historically as an exemplar or paradigm for human violence (as humans, particularly men, have imitated their divine monarch). But beyond this violence, McFague intimates at a different (disempowering) function of the monarchical model, which is perhaps more characteristic of women's experience. According to McFague, this model of God fosters, at worst, "militarism and destruction" (if we—typically men—*imitate* God's sovereignty) and, at best, "attitudes of passivity and escape from responsibility" (if we—usually women—understand ourselves in *contrast* to God, who has all power).⁵³ McFague thus proposes alternative, non-violent, and empowering models of God for this "ecological, nuclear age," namely God's embodiment in the world, God as Mother who births the universe, or God as Lover and Friend of the earth.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, the model of divine creative power represented in the objections of White and McFague finds unwitting support in the comments of many biblical scholars concerning Genesis 1. These comments come especially to the fore in comparisons between the creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2. The obvious differences in content, sequence, style, and emphasis of the two accounts are typically portrayed in the literature in terms of two central contrasts, namely 1) between God's transcendence and immanence, and 2) between the orderliness and unpredictability of creation.

As an example of the first contrast, James Crenshaw distinguishes the

portrayals of God in the two creation accounts as follows: "In the first account the Deity is transcendent, removed from any contact [with the world] except verbal, whereas the second story emphasizes divine nearness in very concrete ways."⁵⁵ Tamara Cohen Eskenazi likewise explains that the creation accounts portray "God as both magisterially remote (Genesis 1) and intimately engaged with creation (Genesis 2)."⁵⁶

The second contrast is illustrated by Robert Alter's depiction of creation in Genesis 1 as essentially a harmonious "balancing of opposites" in contrast to the concern evident in Genesis 2 with "the complicated and difficult facts of human life in civilization."⁵⁷ And Crenshaw, in a similar manner, states that whereas "within the Priestly creation account there is complete symmetry,"⁵⁸ Genesis 2 portrays reality as "unpredictable."⁵⁹

Both sets of contrasts are brought together in an important rhetorical study of Genesis 1-2 by Dale Patrick and Allen Scult titled "Genesis and Power."⁶⁰ Like Crenshaw, Alter, and Eskenazi, these authors attempt not to sever, but to creatively juxtapose (as complementary), the portrayals of God in the two creation accounts. For Patrick and Scult, Genesis 1 and 2 portray two necessary, but fundamentally different, types of power, which they name divine *authorship* (Genesis 1) and divine *authority* (Genesis 2), respectively. Whereas *authorship* refers to "a circumscribing force" extrinsic to that over which power is exercised and which is able unilaterally to "determine the outcome" (much as an author transcends and is able to control what he writes), *authority* refers to a form of power that is more relational and engaged, indeed is "embroiled in the indeterminacy of conflict."⁶¹

Whatever the good intentions of Patrick and Scult (and others) who desire to keep both portrayals of divine power in creative tension, if Genesis 1 does indeed portray God as extrinsic, transcendent force or will unilaterally imposing order upon creation as an inert object, then I would have to agree in principle with White and McFague. Given the notion of humanity as *imago Dei*, this picture of divine creative power (upon which humans are to model their actions) could very well serve to legitimate aggressive control and limitless exploitation of the natural world, or possibly passivity and disempowerment in some cases (as McFague intimates).⁶² Whereas the portrayal of God as divine Warrior which Catherine Keller discerns in Genesis 1 would constitute the text's endorsement of explicit violence from the beginning of the world, White's and McFague's critical (and even Patrick and Scult's more sanguine) discernment of an extrinsic divine transcendence deterministically ordering creation (a form of a primordial coercion) might

constitute the endorsement of an *implicit* violence at the human level.

These feminist and ecological objections to the notion of human and divine power in Genesis 1 make the paradigmatic character of the text in question immensely problematic, especially for those, like myself, interested in what sort of ethics the text might authorize. But they also make the text worthy of further study. These objections thus require us, minimally, to investigate whether a responsible reading of the text discloses an oppressive ideology or whether this ideology is more a function of the text's later effective history, that is, how it has been received by successive communities of interpretation throughout the ages.

While this essay does not claim to be any sort of definitive answer to these important ethical objections, it does constitute an attempt to explore what sort of creative power Genesis 1 rhetorically depicts God as exercising, specifically with the above objections in mind. On my reading, the text depicts God's founding exercise of creative power in such a way that we might appropriately describe it as an act of *love*. This depiction arises from a number of rhetorical features of the text.

VARIATIONS IN THE LITERARY PATTERN OF GENESIS 1

The first feature is the curious occurrence of non-predictable variations in the literary patterning of Genesis 1. These variations fly in the face of the well-worn characterization of the rhetorical world of Genesis 1, by numerous commentators, as a world *par excellence* of ordered regularity.

First, there are variations in what I call the "fiat" pattern of the text. This is the pattern, recognized by many scholars, of 1) God's *fiat* ("let there be"), followed by 2) an *execution report* ("and it was so"), and 3) an *evaluation report* ("God saw that it was good").

Yet this pattern (repeated for each of God's eight creative acts, over six days of creation) is inexplicably broken at a number of points. Thus the *execution report* ("and it was so") is missing from God's sixth creative act (fish and birds) on day 5 and from God's eighth creative act (humanity) on day 6. Likewise, the *evaluation report* ("God saw that it was good") is missing from God's second creative act (separation of the waters) on day 2 and from God's eighth creative act (humanity) on day 6. Actually, it is not quite accurate to say that the execution report or the evaluation report is simply missing from God's eighth creative act. That would be too simple. Technically, they are not missing, but *displaced*, the execution report to 1:29, where it serves to conclude God's assignment of food to both humans and

animals, and the evaluation report to 1:31 where it functions to summarize God's evaluation of the entire creative process ("God saw all that he had made, and behold it was very good").

To make things even more complicated, however, the text contains two quite different sets of execution reports. Whereas the first type reports in summary fashion that "it was so" (or, in the first case, that "there was light"), the second type is more extended and reports some specific action of God (making, creating or separating).⁶³ The second type occurs either in lieu of the first type (in one instance, on day 5) or more typically it supplements the first type, though in one case (God's third creative act, the separation of land from water) it is simply absent.

Furthermore, the order of the elements in the fiat pattern is not always the same for each of the eight creative acts (SEE FIGURE 1, page 68). If we number the elements according to their first occurrence (such that 1 stands for God's fiat, 2 for the summary execution report, 3 for the evaluation report, and 4 for the more extended execution report), with x any missing element in the pattern, the order could be represented as follows. For God's first creative act, the order is 1, 2, 3, 4; for the second act, it is 1, 4, 2, x; for the third act, it is 1, 2, 3, x; for the fourth act it is 1, 2, 4a, 3; for the fifth act, 1, 2, 4b, 3; for the sixth act, 1, 4, 3, x; for the seventh act, 1, 2, 4, 3; and for the eighth act, 1, 4, 2x, 3x (the combination of x with 2 and 3 here symbolizes a displaced—not quite missing—element).⁶⁴

Even the fourth, fifth, and seventh creative acts, which, on the surface, seem to follow an identical pattern (1, 2, 4, 3), harbor a further variation in the form that the extended execution report takes, indicated above by the addition of the letters a and b to 4 in two of the cases. In the fourth act, the extended execution report does not report God's action at all, but that of a creature (the earth), while in the fifth act, the report is doubled, reporting first that God made the great lights and secondly that God placed them in the dome of the heavens. Furthermore, this execution report is so expanded that it has become an extended purpose statement for the creation of the heavenly bodies. That is, even when item 4 (the extended execution report) appears in the same relative position in the fiat pattern, there are internal variations in the nature and function of the item.

A further, equally non-predictable variation in the fiat pattern is the fact that half of the fiats (numbers 1, 2, 3 and 5) simply call a particular creature to exist (or to be separated, as in number 3), without specifying how that will come to be (e.g., "let there be light" or "let the waters be gathered"), while the other half (numbers 4, 6, 7 and 8) name a creature God has previously

created and invite that creature actively to participate in the creative process (e.g., "let the land produce vegetation").⁶⁵ All of this suggests that although there is a discernible pattern to each of God's eight creative acts, this pattern is by no means simple, obvious, or predictable. It is, on the contrary, highly complex.

A second set of important literary variations concerns what I call the pattern of "panels" in the text. Since at least the eighteenth century, biblical scholars have noted that God's creative days may be divided into two symmetrical triads or corresponding panels of three days each.⁶⁶ The first panel (days 1-3) has to do largely with God engaging in acts of *division* or *separation*, by which God brings into being the various regions or spaces or realms of the created order; while the second panel (days 4-6) has to do with God *filling* these regions he has previously separated with living (or at least mobile) beings. It has even been suggested that these two panels (of regions and occupants) correspond to the introductory statement in verse 2 that the earth was "formless" (*tohu*) and "empty" (*bohu*).⁶⁷ The act of creation would then consist in God bringing form and structure to that which was formless (panel 1) and filling with living or mobile creatures that which was empty (panel 2).⁶⁸ Genesis 2:1 would thus provide a fitting conclusion (an inclusion, perhaps) to the creation story in its summary statement that "the heavens and the earth were created" (panel 1) "and all their host" (panel 2).⁶⁹

Whether or not Genesis 1:2 and 2:1 can be made to bear this particular interpretation, the division into two triadic panels seems quite secure (SEE FIGURE 2, page 69). Thus, on days 1-3, God separates light from darkness and names them "day" and "night" (day 1), then separates the waters above from the waters below by a firmament or transparent dome and names this dome "sky" (day 2), then separates the waters below from dry ground and names them "seas" and "earth" (or "land") respectively (day 3). Corresponding to days 1-3, we have days 4-6, on which God fills precisely the static spaces he has just created with the mobile creatures that appropriately inhabit them. Hence, on day 4, corresponding to the separation of light and darkness on day 1, God sets sun, moon, and stars (which are mobile, though not living, creatures) in the sky; corresponding to the separation of sky and waters on day 2, God fills the waters with fish and the sky with birds on day 5; and corresponding to the separation of dry land from the waters on day 3, God fills this land with land animals of all sorts, including humans, on day 6. And running through the correspondences, there is an observable progression, repeated in each panel, from heaven (days 1 and 4) to waters (days 2 and 5) to earth (days 3 and 6).⁷⁰

But this beautifully simple pattern of correspondences is complicated (beautifully) by the fact that whereas days 1-2 and days 4-5 contain one single act of creation each, days 3 and 6 (at the bottom of each panel) contain two acts each. So we have eight creative acts, each introduced by a divine decree or fiat, spread over six days. Thus, on day 3, we find both the separation of dry land from the waters and the growth of vegetation on the dry land. And on day 6, corresponding to these two acts of creation on day 3, we have the creation first of land animals and then of humans, a special kind of land animal. This is certainly beautiful symmetry and it seems—at first blush—to corroborate the judgment of many biblical scholars concerning the prominence of balance and order in the text.

Yet note two anomalies in this pattern. First of all, God's fourth creative act (on day 3) is the creation of vegetation (plants and trees) on the land. But this is technically an act of *filling* (not forming) which seems out of place in terms of the literary structure of the chapter.⁷¹ Yet it could be said that plants and trees are not mobile creatures (in the same sense that fish, birds, animals, humans and the heavenly bodies are) and so they fit in the first panel, which describes the creation of static realms.

The second anomaly in the literary pattern of the panels is God's fifth creative act (the heavenly bodies) on day 4. Although this is certainly an act of filling (which fits days 4-6), it might appropriately have been placed in the first panel (days 1-3) since the stated purpose of the sun and moon is to separate day from night or light from dark (this is, however, temporal, not spatial separation).⁷² So we have the interesting phenomenon of two sets of borderline creatures (vegetation and the heavenly bodies) that overlap from one panel to the next. Would it be appropriate to say that although the text is clearly concerned with ordered categories of creation, these categories have "fuzzy" boundaries?⁷³

Beyond these, there are other non-predictable variations in the text relevant for our consideration. Thus, the text uses a cardinal number in the "evening and morning" formula concluding the first day of creation ("day one") and ordinals for the rest ("second day," "third day" etc.). Then, we find the presence of the Hebrew definite article in the formula for day 6 ("and there was evening and morning, *the* sixth day") and in the references to day 7 ("*the* seventh day"), in contrast to the lack of the article in the first five occurrences of the formula.⁷⁴

We might further cite the distribution of God's acts of "creating" (*bara*) versus "making" or "doing" (*'asah*) throughout the text (*bara* in 1:1, 21, 27 [three times], 2:3; *'asah* in 1:7, 16, 25, 26 and 31, 2:2 [twice], 2:3). While the

words do have slightly different semantic ranges, there is no unequivocally clear rationale for their distribution in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

I could go on, for example, by citing God's *mode* of creation/making in the text. While the majority of God's creative acts in Genesis 1 presuppose the existence of the *tohû wabohû* (the earth in its initial watery or chaotic state) and represent God shaping or developing this primordial "stuff" into more complex creatures, three exceptions seem to be light (on day 1), the firmament (on day 2), and humanity (on day 6). These three creative acts are all portrayed rhetorically as *ex nihilo* or *de novo*, without the mention of any prior matter used in their construction.

While none of these literary variations is strictly predictable, some of them do make sense in terms of the architectonic scheme of the text, perhaps highlighting rhetorically some important point. Many of the variations, however, seem on the face of it random (and it is not an easy task to determine which are which).⁷⁵

But more than that, the sheer number of variations in the patterning of the text can be multiplied almost infinitely (I have barely scratched the surface). There are even nuanced sub-variations within the variations. Although I have already indicated some of these, there are others. Thus we find the intriguing fact that of the four times that a creature is invited to participate in the creative process, only once is it actually reported that a creature acted on the invitation (the land brought forth vegetation); in the other cases, the creature is called to act, but *God's* action is reported.⁷⁶ And there is the further variation that while the first seven of God's fiats are jussives, the eighth is a cohortative (let us make"), where the subject of the action is God together with the (implied) heavenly court.⁷⁷

This complexity reminds me of nothing so much as "fractals" in contemporary chaos theory, the phenomenon whereby complex, non-Euclidian shapes (like a coastline or the edge of a leaf) remain equally complex no matter what level of magnification is used to observe them. No matter how deep you go with a fractal, you never reach a straight line; there is always more complexity to be found. The literary variations of Genesis 1:1-2:3 are, I submit, analogous to fractals in this respect.

But these literary variations are like fractals also in being fundamentally non-predicable. That is, whereas the world rhetorically depicted in Genesis 1 is certainly ordered, patterned, and purposive (a point often noted by commentators), this world is not mechanically determined, as if it were governed by ineluctable ironclad Newtonian laws. The literary variations suggest that creation is neither random (stochastic) nor strictly predictable

(deterministic). There is a certain (if I might dare to say it) incipient subjectivity or freedom granted to the cosmos by God, by which it is allowed, in response to the Creator's call, to find its own pattern.⁷⁸ The God who is artisan and maker, reflected rhetorically in the literary artistry of the text, does not over-determine the order of the cosmos.

There is a helpful analogy here to what chaos theorists call a "strange attractor" (SEE FIGURE 3, page 70). The notion of a "strange attractor" is an attempt to describe the stabilizing factor in systems of turbulence (such as a waterfall, the stock market, or the human brain). As such, it is an alternative to the two main types of attractors previously known in physics, namely fixed points (in steady-state systems) and limit cycles (in continuously repetitive dynamic systems).⁷⁹ Although the path of motion around a strange attractor looks, on the surface, random, it is actually fractal, exhibiting (paradoxically) infinity and unpredictability within a closed, finite system. This is very like the literary pattern of Genesis 1, which combines a repetitive order with unpredictable variations. Thus, to follow up on the analogy from chaos mathematics, not only does Genesis 1 depict a fractal universe, but it depicts a Creator less like a Newtonian lawgiver and more like a strange attractor (SEE FIGURE 4, page 71).

GOD SHARES POWER WITH CREATURES

While this non-coercive freedom God grants to creation is not exactly synonymous with "love" (on most understandings of the term), it is a move in that direction. A much clearer move, however, is the text's depiction of the process of creation as God sharing power with creatures, inviting them to participate (as they are able) in the creative process itself.⁸⁰ Thus, among the many purpose statements given for the creation of sun and moon is the statement that they are to *govern* the day and the night (1:16, 18). If we think about it, this correlates perfectly with their purpose (also stated) to *separate* day from night (1:14, 18). Both governing (or ruling) and separating are paradigmatically divine acts not only in the ancient Near East (especially in Sumerian and Akkadian creation accounts), but also in Genesis 1, where God's sovereign creative activity on days 1-3 consists precisely in three acts of separation by which the major spaces or realms of the created order are demarcated. Likewise, the "expanse" or "firmament" (*raqia'*) which God created (on day 2) is granted the god-like function of separating the waters above from the waters below (1:6), in imitation of God's own separation of light from darkness on day 1. Rhetorically, this implies that sun, moon, and

firmament, like humans in God's image, participate in (or imitate) God's own creative actions. God grants these royal tasks to creatures willingly, allowing them a share of his power and rule.

But these are by no means the only "divine" actions that creatures participate in. On days 3, 5 and 6 (in vv. 11-12, 20, and 24), God commands or (better) invites the earth (twice) and the waters (once) to participate in creation by bringing forth living creatures. Whereas the earth is invited to produce first vegetation (v. 11) and later land animals (v. 24), the waters are invited to teem with water creatures (v. 20).⁸¹ They are invited, in other words, to exercise their God-given fertility and thus to imitate God's own creative actions in filling the world with living things. Actually, God takes quite a risk in calling for the earth to produce vegetation since up to that point in the story God has not yet engaged in the act of filling (it is not until days 4-6 that God fills with mobile beings the regions or spaces demarcated on days 1-3). So, on day 3, the earth literally has no model or exemplar to follow. Indeed, on the next day, it is *God* who imitates the *earth's* creative action by filling the sky with heavenly bodies which, in the literary structure of Genesis 1, is a derivative action.⁸² God is, rhetorically speaking, pre-empted by the earth.⁸³

But beyond the invitation to the earth and the waters, God "blesses" the fish and the birds on day 5, and humans on day 6, with fertility, and invites them to multiply and *fill* the waters and the earth, (again) in imitation of God's own creative acts of filling. In this connection, there is a notable asymmetry between God's acts of separation (acts 1-3, on days 1-3) and filling (acts 4-8, on days 3-6), which also suggests a willingness to share royal power on God's part. The asymmetry consists in the intriguing detail that while God names the various realms or spaces that have been separated, God does not name any of the inhabitants of those realms.⁸⁴ Why does God refrain from naming these creatures? Perhaps because the Creator does not want to hoard this prerogative, but, on the contrary, wishes to give space for humanity to complete this privileged task. And indeed in Genesis 2 *'adam* names the animals, thus exhibiting his rule over them.⁸⁵

While these are not dimensions of the Genesis 1 creation story that are often noticed, attention to these rhetorical features points us to a God who does not hoard divine creative power, with some desperate need to control, but rather to a God who is generous with power, sharing it with creatures, that they might make their own contribution to the harmony and beauty of the world.⁸⁶

THE HUMAN CONTRIBUTION

But the contribution of creatures, which God not only allows but indeed encourages, is clearest and most decisive in the case of humanity, to whom God explicitly grants the status and role of *tzelem 'lohim* (the image of God) and the commission to extend God's royal administration of the world as authorized representatives on earth.⁸⁷

What is paradoxical is that precisely at this point my reading of the text is in significant tension with a previously mentioned rhetorical study of Genesis 1 by Dale Patrick and Allen Scult. Patrick and Scult claim that God is depicted in the text with such absolute power that humans are rendered powerless objects of divine will (a depiction, at least implicitly, of God as tyrant, and certainly in conflict with my claim regarding love). God's power, according to Patrick and Scult, is literally "authorial," indicated by (among other things) creation by the word. It is the power of an author over a composition or inert piece of work. Humans, by contrast, they *correctly* note, are the subjects of no actions in the text. Humans quite literally do nothing in Genesis 1.⁸⁸ This portrayal of God vis-à-vis humans in Genesis 1 is "balanced," they argue, by the more "parental" image of God in Genesis 2, where humans are depicted as agents in their own right, conversing with, even resisting, their Creator/Parent.⁸⁹

Now there is some truth to this reading. While *'adam* is the (implicit) grammatical subject of *radah* (rule) and *kabaš* (subdue) in Genesis 1:26, this language occurs in God's commissioning of the human creature, and not in any reported action performed by humans in the chapter. The trouble is that Patrick and Scult draw the wrong conclusion from this important point. Not only do they ignore the text's clear and explicit assertion that humans are created *like* this "authorial" God, commissioned to rule the animals and subdue the earth (which they would be hard put to explain), but more importantly their reading misrepresents the rhetorical (indeed, canonical) relationship between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and what follows. Whereas God grants humans the power of agency on the sixth day of creation, setting the stage, so to speak, for the drama of human history-making, the actual exercise of human agency does not begin until the paradise/fall story of Genesis 2-3.

There are two important rhetorical clues for understanding Genesis 1 not as an alternative creation story to Genesis 2 (which it either contradicts or balances), but as a prelude to the rest of the Genesis narrative, setting up the

normative conditions for what follows. The first clue is the highly significant absence of the concluding "evening and morning" formula on the seventh day, an absence which Augustine noted sixteen centuries ago.⁹⁰ Each day of creation is concluded by the line "and there was evening and there was morning," day one, second day, third day, etc., until the sixth day. But when creation is complete and we would expect a final formula, "There was evening and there was morning, the seventh day," there is none, rhetorically indicating that the seventh day is open-ended or unfinished. In the literary structure of the book of Genesis, the seventh day has no conclusion since God continues to "rest" from creating, having entrusted care of the earth to human beings.⁹¹ Thus the paradise/fall story of chapters 2-3 takes place (as do all the events narrated in the book of Genesis and, by extension, in the rest of the Bible) on the seventh day, when God "rests," having delegated post-creation rule of the earth to humanity.⁹²

This leads to the other rhetorical clue for the relationship of Genesis 1:1-2:3 with what follows, namely the *tôlê dôt* formula, found in Genesis 2:4a, which introduces the "generations" of the heavens and the earth, in the sense of what developed out of them.⁹³ Throughout the book of Genesis the phrase "these are the *tôlê dôt* of" Terah, Noah's sons, Ishmael, etc., introduces either a list of progeny descended from the one named (their genealogy) or an ensuing narrative involving prominent members of the named person's progeny. But in Genesis 2:4a the formula is distinct in that it serves to introduce the first episode of human history (the paradise/fall story), as that which developed out of "the heavens and the earth" which God has just finished creating.⁹⁴ The fact that Genesis 1:1-2:3 does not begin with a *tôlê dôt* formula suggests it functions as a prologue to the rest of the book, constituting a description of the initial conditions which (ought to) hold for the rest of the story. It is for this reason — and not because it portrays God as having all power — that no human activity is reported in the Genesis 1 creation story.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 thus portrays God as taking the risk, first of blessing human beings with fertility and entrusting them with power over the earth and the animals, and then of stepping back, withdrawing, to allow humans to exercise this newly granted power, to see what develops. Contrary to Patrick and Scult's analysis, Genesis 1 depicts what is precisely a loving, parental exercise of power on God's part. Indeed, God in Genesis 1 is like no one as much as a Mother, who gives life to her children, blesses them, and enhances their power and agency, and then takes the parental risk of allowing her progeny to take their first steps, to attempt to use their power, to develop towards maturity.⁹⁵

That this maturity is radically different from the unlimited exploitation of the world that Lynn White and others are so worried about is indicated by the central fact which has been staring us in the face: the text itself states that God's action and rule are paradigmatic for human action. This is indicated both by the notion of humanity created in God's image and likeness and by the text's canonical placement at the beginning of Scripture. Given my rhetorical reading of Genesis 1, this suggests, minimally, that the sort of power or rule that humans are to exercise is loving power. It is power used to nurture, enhance, and empower others, non-coercively, for *their* benefit, not for the self-aggrandizement of the one exercising power.⁹⁶ In its canonical place in the book of Genesis, the creation story in 1:1-2:3 thus serves as a normative limit and judgment on the violence which pervades the primeval history, indeed the rest of the Bible, and human history generally.⁹⁷

In pointed contrast to this violence (especially as portrayed in Genesis 3-6), a beautiful example of the loving exercise of power is found in the actions of Noah in the context of the Flood story. In Genesis 3, the primeval human pair rebel against God and then Adam begins to rule the woman (a rule which is not reciprocated) and names her "Eve" (thus treating her as he did the animals).⁹⁸ In Genesis 4, Cain impulsively murders his brother Abel out of resentment, while he-man Lamech boasts to his two wives (the first reference to polygamy in the Bible) that he has in vengeance killed a youth for daring to injure him. And this violent propensity spirals out of control until in Genesis 6 humans fill the earth with their violence or bloodshed (*chamas*), and the earth, which God created good, becomes corrupt and God is "grieved" (*'atzab*) in her heart that she ever raised such an ungrateful brood of children (6:5-6). And then comes the flood. But while humans in the primeval history typically use their power autonomously and so violently, Noah is a righteous man (6:9) and so exercises power in a different manner. It is significant, I believe, that the one righteous person exercises rule over the animals by taking them on the ark and thus preserving their life in a time of threat.⁹⁹ Noah in the Flood story is an example of someone imitating God's paradigmatic life-enhancing use of power as depicted in Genesis 1.

CREATION FOUNDED IN LOVE

Like every reading of any text, this one is contestable, subject to dispute at various points and (admittedly) dependent on the preunderstanding and commitments of the interpreter. Nevertheless, in view of what is ethically at stake here, I have taken the risk of offering my reading of Genesis 1:1-2:3.

I have argued that the objections of Keller, White, McFague, while representing important ethical concerns (which I largely share), are simply misguided in the case of Genesis 1. Although it is undeniable that the text has historically been read through the lens of the *Enuma Elish* and the Western aspiration of the scientific conquest of nature, with resulting violence against women and the environment, Genesis 1 is by no means locked into this economy of meaning. On the contrary, a close reading of the text depicts God neither as a warrior creating by violence nor as an extrinsic transcendence unilaterally imposing order on the world. Rather, Genesis 1 artfully shatters both ancient and modern rhetorical expectations and, instead, depicts God as a generous Creator, sharing power with a variety of creatures, inviting them (and trusting them — at some risk) to participate in the creative (and historical) process.¹⁰⁰

I, of course, harbor no illusions that one alternative reading of a single biblical text can change by fiat an ingrained mindset or habitual praxis concerning the use of power. Nevertheless, given the long modern history of misreading (which constitutes an act of violence against the text), perhaps it is time to begin a pattern of reading differently, respecting the alterity of the text, listening for its word to us, attending to its disclosure of God and the human calling. Perhaps, then, our practice of reading (which we might call a hermeneutic of love) would model in advance the new ethic of inter-human relationships and ecological practice that we are aiming for and which is rooted in this very text.

In the end, the theological claim (which connects the textual reading to the ethical praxis) amounts to the thesis that we ought not to separate our redemptive vision of God's love from God's creative power. Speaking out of my own (Christian) tradition, I would say that—without theological contradiction—Genesis 1:1-2:3 converges on John 3:16. In both creation and redemption, "God so loved the world that he gave"

Figure 1 Variations in the Fiat Pattern of Genesis 1

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
2	4	2	2	2	4	2	4	4
3	2	3	4a	4b	3	4	2x	2x
4	x	x	3	3	x	3	3x	3x

Legend:
 1 = fiat ("let there be")
 2 = summary execution report ("and it was so")
 3 = evaluation report ("and God saw that it was good")
 4 = extended execution report (specific creative action of God noted)
 x = missing or displaced element
 a, b = internal variation within an element of the pattern
 Roman numerals (I, II, etc.) represent God's eight creative acts over six days

Figure 2 The Structure of Literary Panels in Genesis 1:1-2:3

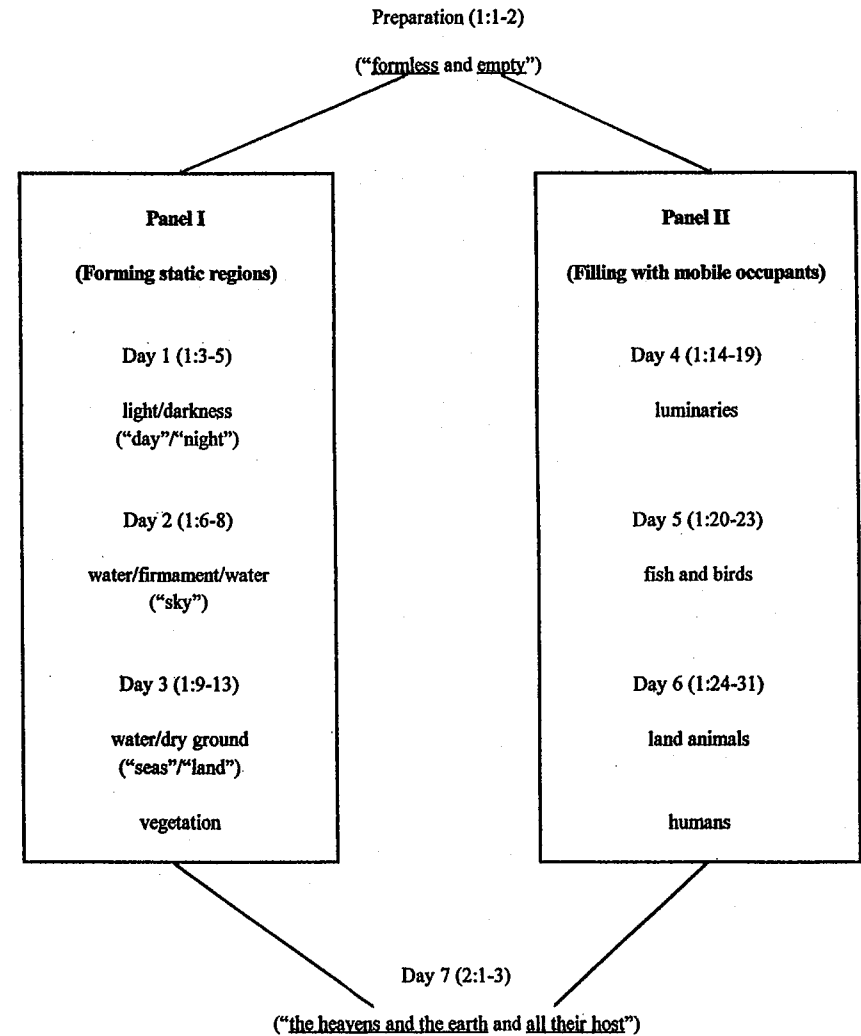


Figure 3 The Lorenz Strange Attractor

The Lorenz attractor is a butterfly-shaped chaotic system that contains an infinite number of trajectories that never intersect one another within a bounded space. By plotting the trajectories over time in three-dimensional space, the strange attractor, which governs the chaotic system, can be discerned. The upper left hand graph shows a non-fractal attempt to plot the variables, resulting in no discernable pattern whatsoever.

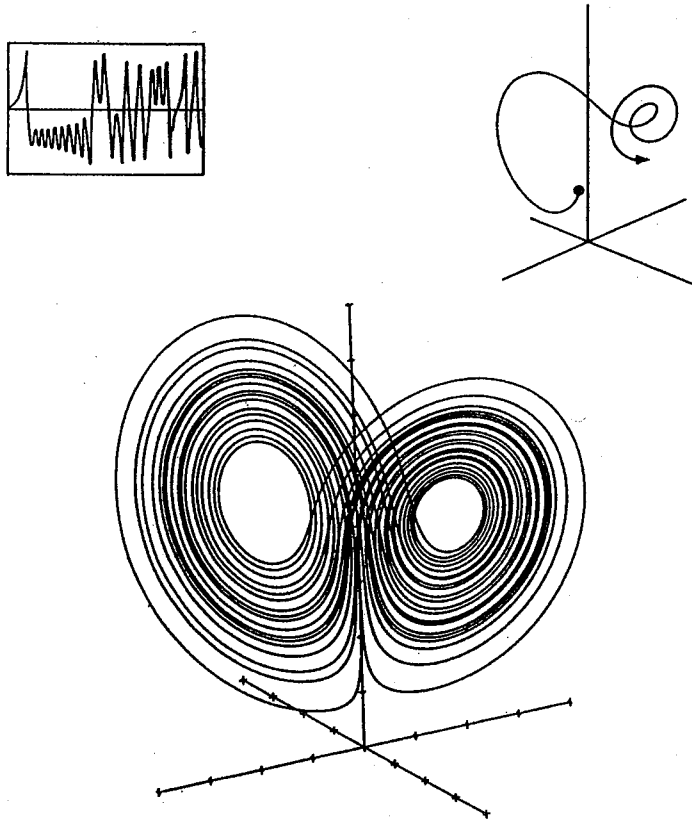
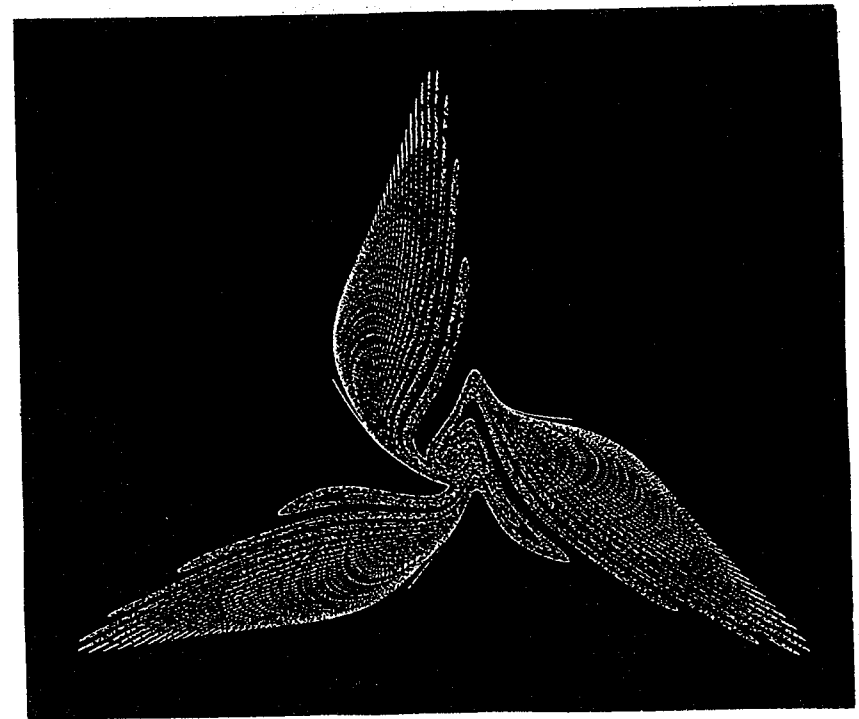


Figure 4 The Winged Bird Attractor

A famous chaotic pattern, the winged bird attractor reveals the inherent order discernable over time in what initially seem to be random variations.



Notes

¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at a conference on Love in Jewish, Christian and Islamic Traditions, hosted by the Brock Philosophical Society at Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, February, 1995, and in the Exegesis of Biblical Texts on Ethical Themes Group at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Philadelphia, PA, November, 1995.

² For a preliminary attempt to elucidate the meaning of humanity as *imago Dei*, without however engaging in extensive rhetorical analysis of the creation story, see my essay "The Liberating Image? Interpreting the *Imago Dei* in Context," *Christian Scholar's Review* 24/1 (1994): 8-25; and also J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity; London: SPCK, 1995), 111-125.

³ For example, R. Hooykaas, *Religion and the Rise of Modern Science* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972); Eugene M. Klaaren, *Religious Origins of Modern Science: Belief in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977); M. B. Foster, "The Christian Doctrine of Creation and the Rise of Modern Natural Science," *Mind* 43 (1934): 446-468; and Francis Oakley, "Christian Theology and the Newtonian Science: The Rise of the Concept of the Laws of Nature," *Church History* 30 (1961): 433-457.

⁴ Bacon's role in the development of modern science is addressed in Richard Foster Jones, *Ancients and Moderns: A Study in the Rise of the Scientific Movement in Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Dover Publications, 1982). Even before Bacon, Renaissance humanists in fifteenth century Italy (like Ficino, Morandi, and Pico della Mirandola) developed an interpretation of the *imago Dei* as the creative, transformative, energy by which humans (in imitation of God's own creative activity) shape earthly life through cultural-historical action, whether in city-building, alchemy, politics, scholarship or the arts. On the Renaissance humanists and the *imago Dei*, see the massive study by Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). For an analysis of modernity as an historical epoch with its own distinctive ideals and worldview, see Brian J. Walsh and J. Richard Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), chaps. 8 and 9; and Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, chap. 1.

⁵ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," chap. 1 of *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Derrida's point that writing (and all of life) is *intrinsically* (always already) both remedy and poison (see esp. p. 70) is somewhat different from the point I am making here, namely that texts *may* be used in different ways, some healthy, some not. I am concerned, in other words, to note that the "effective history" (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) or interpretive reception of texts (Genesis 1 included) is not predetermined in advance,

but often develops in ways (negative or positive) that contravene "authorial intent."

⁶ Catherine Keller, *From a Broken Web: Separation, Sexism, and Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986). Although I ultimately dissent from Keller's reading of Genesis 1, I am sympathetic to a great deal (though not all) of the overall argument of this superb book.

⁷ On the relationship between the oppression of women and the environmental crisis, see Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

⁸ This is the burden of Keller's argument in *From a Broken Web*, chap. 2: "Of Men and Monsters" (pp. 47-92).

⁹ Herman Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos in Urzeit und Endzeit: Eine religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung über Gen 1 und Ap Joh 12* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). Charles A. Muenchow's abridged English translation of pp. 3-120 has been published as "The Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Biblical Creation Story," chap. 1 in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson, *Issues in Religion and Theology* 6 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 25-52.

¹⁰ Note that whereas Gunkel (followed by Keller) thought that *ʾhôm* was derived from *ti'amat*, most Old Testament scholars have followed Alexander Heidel's argument that this is morphologically impossible and that both words probably have a common (proto-) Semitic root (Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation*, 2nd ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1951; "Phoenix Books," 1963), 100.

¹¹ The *Enuma Elish* actually contains a double combat motif. Early on in the myth, before Marduk vanquishes Tiamat (who represents the salt water ocean), Ea (Marduk's father) vanquishes Tiamat's consort Apsu (who represents the fresh waters). For English translations of the *Enuma Elish*, see E.A. Speiser, "Akkadian Myths and Epics," pp. 60-72, in James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. with Supplement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, chap. 1: "Enuma Elish"; and Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), "The Epic of Creation," 228-277.

¹² Among the minority who posit an Egyptian background for Genesis 1, see James K. Hoffmeier, "Some Thoughts on Genesis 1 & 2 and Egyptian Cosmology," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society* 15 (1983): 39-49; and A. S. Yahuda, *The Language of the Pentateuch in Its Relation to Egyptian Literature and History*, vol. 1 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), esp. chaps. 2 and 3. For references to the other positions taken on the matter, see *infra*, nn. 36 and 39.

¹³ Her comparison of the *Enuma Elish* with Genesis 1 is found in *From a Broken Web*, 73-92.

¹⁴ Ibid, 80, 85.

¹⁵ Ibid., 86, 87. She especially appeals to James Hillman.

¹⁶ Ibid., 86.

¹⁷ One of the problems with this approach to reading texts is that it looks for similarities of underlying themes and genres, but tends to ignore the particularity or "actuality" (to use James Muilenburg's term), that is, the actual rhetorical assertions of the text under consideration. To put it differently, although two texts may utilize a similar motif or theme, what is crucial is not simply pointing out this similarity, but discerning how each text distinctively uses the theme in question. Part of the problem goes back to Gunkel himself, who pioneered the discipline of "form criticism," which was based on the comparison of literary genres and motifs in the Bible and the ancient Near East. For an important critique of this comparative approach by a leading form critic who was at the time President of the Society of Biblical Literature, see James Muilenburg's now classic 1968 presidential address, published as "Form Criticism and Beyond," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88/1 (March 1969): 1-18. Muilenburg is widely credited with inaugurating the discipline of rhetorical criticism of the Hebrew Bible, a discipline to which I am indebted in this essay. For a brilliant analysis of the significance of *differences* in the use of a common motif, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), chap. 3, which examines five betrothal type-scenes in the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁸ See Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon, 1969), 194-198. Ricoeur's extensive analysis of the *Enuma Elish* occurs in part II, chap 1: "The Drama of Creation and the 'Ritual' Vision of the World." Ricoeur's analysis of the function of the combat myth may be applicable also in other ancient Near Eastern cultures outside of Babylon. For example, the Egyptian combat myth known as "The Repulsing of the Dragon" was interpreted in ancient times as a mythic account to be historically enacted in military campaigns of the pharaoh against the enemies of the empire. For various versions of "The Repulsing of the Dragon," see Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 7, 11-12, and 367 (this myth portrays the nightly struggle of the sun god Re with Apophis the serpent who tries to swallow him in the underworld, followed by Re's victory resulting in the birth of the new day). Although we have no evidence concerning the political implications of the Ugaritic combat myths, in which Ba'al conquers watery enemies, it is likely they had a similar function. On the political implications of the combat myth in Israel, see Patrick D. Miller, Jr., *Holy War and Cosmic War in Early Israel* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Harvard Divinity School, 1963).

¹⁹ *The Symbolism of Evil*, 182-183. Another author who discerns the violent implications of the combat myth for human life is liberation theologian Pedro Trigo. Trigo addresses the function of the modern worldview (which he thinks is modeled on the ancient combat myth) in fostering geopolitical violence (especially in the

Third World) in his *Creation and History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), part 2, entitled "From Chaos and Cosmos to Faith in Creation" (pp. 69-108). The significance of the combat myth can, however, be read differently. Thus Jon Levenson (in *Creation and the Persistence of Evil: The Jewish Drama of Omnipotence* [San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988]) can celebrate what he takes to be the positive psychological value of the myth, whether found in the ancient Near East, the Bible, or later Jewish writings. Although I find Levenson's analysis of the existential sense of fragility that results from the combat myth quite profound (esp. chap. 2: "The Survival of Chaos After the Victory of God," pp. 14-25), by and large he does not adequately address the negative ethical and political implications of the *Chaoskampf* theme, particularly its function to legitimate violence on the human plane.

²⁰ Keller, *From a Broken Web*, 77.

²¹ Likewise worthy of sustained interaction is Keller's more recent book, *Apocalypse Now and Then: A Feminist Guide to the End of the World* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), which continues the argument of *From a Broken Web* in challenging religious expectations of a violent end to evil. Some of her argument from the more recent book is distilled in "Power Lines," chap. 4 in *Power, Powerlessness, and the Divine: New Inquires in Bible and Theology*, ed. Cynthia L. Rigby (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1997).

²² This is not to say that the theme of God doing battle with the sea or the waters is absent from the Hebrew Bible. On the contrary, it is quite common in poetic texts, though rarely, in my opinion, denoting creation. More usually, the mythological waters allude to historical enemies whom God has vanquished or will vanquish (as in Psalms 18:15-17, 65:7, 144:7; and Isaiah 17:12-13) or to the Red Sea through which the Israelites passed at the exodus (as in Psalms 77:16-20, 106:9, 114:3, 5; and Isaiah 51:10; cf. Habakkuk 3:8). The background of such texts is, however, to be found not in the *Enuma Elish*, but in Ugaritic mythology where Ba'al vanquishes an enemy known variously as Prince Yam (Sea) or Judge Nahar (River). In the Hebrew Bible, Sea and River (or Jordan) occur as parallels in the context of the combat myth in Psalm 114:3, 5; and Nahum 1:4.

²³ The theme of creation by separation (the splitting of heaven from earth) is found, for example, in the Sumerian myths *The Creation of the Pick-Ax* and *Gilgamesh, Enkidu, and the Netherworld*. See W. G. Lambert, "The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon," chap. 2 in *Ancient Cosmologies*, ed. Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1975), 42-62.

²⁴ George A. Barton, "Tiamat," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 15 (1893): 18. Note that Barton's article was published even before Gunkel's more famous study (Gunkel cites it in "The Influence of Babylonian Mythology," p. 51, n. 31). Yet, even in this first exhilarating flush of noting similarities between the two accounts, Barton (like Gunkel) was also aware the divergences between them.

²⁵ See, for example, the occurrence of *tannin* (singular) as a mythological adversary or enemy of YHWH (though often representing a historical or political

enemy) in Job 7:12; Psalms 44:20 (Eng 44:19); Isaiah 27:1, 51:19; Ezekiel 29:3 and 32:2. The plural *tanninim* also occurs in Psalm 74:13 and Psalm 89:11 (Eng 98:10).

²⁶ Leviathan (Hebrew *liwyatan*) is described in Isaiah 27:1 as a twisted and crooked serpent, and is mentioned also in Psalms 74:14, 104:26; Job 3:8 and 40:25-41:26 (Eng 41:1-34). Leviathan is the Hebrew version of the seven-headed water serpent known in the Ba'al myths as *ltn* (usually vocalized as *lôtan* since William F. Albright's proposal in "New Light on Early Canaanite Language and Literature," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 46 [1932]: 19). This is evident not only from the fact that both names are philologically equivalent, but also from the description of *lôtan* as a "twisted" and "crooked" serpent in both the Ba'al myth and Isaiah 27:1 (the Ugaritic and Hebrew words used in these texts are precise cognates). Rahab, which clearly designates a serpent in Job 26:12 (but which so far has no known parallel in ancient Near Eastern literature), is mentioned also in Job 9:13; Isaiah 30:7, 51:19; Psalms 87:4, 89:11 (Eng 89:10); and in the plural in Psalm 40:5 (Eng 40:4).

²⁷ Gunkel, "The Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Biblical Creation Story," 49.

²⁸ Jon Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 17, citing one of his students. Levenson goes on to suggest that the sport or play of God with Leviathan in Psalm 104:26 may not be quite so harmless and may in fact represent (as in Job 40:25-26) "catching the great sea beast with a hook and line" (p. 17). However, in his later, more extensive analysis of Psalm 104 (in chap. 5), Levenson refers to Leviathan as God's "toy" and is careful to distinguish this account from creation-by-combat.

²⁹ Eugene F. Roop, *Genesis* (Believers Bible Commentary; Scottdale, PA and Kitchner, ON: Herald, 1987), 27.

³⁰ Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 30; cf. 32. Note that Brueggemann does not oppose command to permission, and thus speaks of God's "lordly permit" (p. 30) which enables creatures to be.

³¹ Roop, *Genesis*, 27.

³² On the various senses of Hebrew *tôb*, see Douglas A. Knight, "Cosmogony and Order in the Hebrew Tradition," chap. 5 in *Cosmogony and Ethical Order: New Studies in Comparative Ethics*, ed. Robin W. Lovin and Frank E. Reynolds (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 145.

³³ This is not to claim that the worldview of Genesis 1 is found consistently throughout Scripture. On the contrary, the Hebrew Bible contains at least three rather clear creation-by-combat texts (Job 26:7-14; Psalms 74:12-17 and 89:5-14) and is full of difficult (perhaps contradictory) ethical tensions, including a theology of holy war (especially in the Deuteronomistic literature).

³⁴ Gunkel speaks either of the "Marduk-Yahweh myth" in the singular ("The Influence of Babylonian Mythology Upon the Biblical Creation Story," p. 43) or of "one and the same myth which is preserved in two different but related versions" (p. 44). He repeatedly calls them "recensions" of the same myth (pp. 46-49).

³⁵ Gunkel notes "the unmistakably huge difference between the Babylonian and the biblical creation accounts. . . . Genesis 1 is essentially a faded myth" (*ibid.*, 46).

³⁶ On Genesis 1 as polemic or critique of ancient Near Eastern ideas, see Gerhard F. Hasel "The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10/1 (1972): 1-20; Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81-102; J. A. Sanders, *The Old Testament in the Cross* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), chap. 2: "Creation and the Creator," 37-55 (esp. pp. 44-45); Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970; reprint of 1966 ed.), 1-36; Flemming Hvidberg, "The Canaanitic Background of Gen. I-III," *Vetus Testamentum* 10 (1960): 285-294; James L. Crenshaw, "The Human Dilemma and the Literature of Dissent," chap. 10 in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 235; Norman C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 26; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1961), 7, 39, 49; Everett Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 12; J. Albertson, "Genesis 1 and the Babylonian Creation Myth," *Thought* 37 (1962): 226-244; and John H. Stek, "What Says the Scripture?" chap. 7 in *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World's Formation*, ed. Howard Van Till et al (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), esp. 229-232.

³⁷ This would, however, require reconstructing the original social context of the creation story. For an attempted reconstruction see Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, chap. 6.

³⁸ This is admitted even by scholars who do not posit an explicit or intentional polemic in the text. See, for example, Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, chap. 3: "Old Testament Parallels," 82-140.

³⁹ For his argument concerning a Canaanite (as opposed to a Mesopotamian) background to biblical cosmogonies, see John Day, *God's Conflict With the Dragon and the Sea: Echoes of a Canaanite Myth in the Old Testament*, University of Cambridge Oriental Publications (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1-18.

⁴⁰ Day, 49, 52, 61. Other creation texts that Day groups with Genesis 1, in that they are characterized by God's non-conflictual containment of the waters, include Psalm 33:7-8; Proverbs 8:24, 27-29; Jeremiah 5:22 and 31:35.

⁴¹ This is the title of Levenson's chapter on Psalm 104 in *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (pp. 53-65), a phrase he also uses to characterize the cosmogony of Genesis 1 (p. 127).

⁴² Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*, 100. Whereas Levenson thinks that creation-by-combat characterizes all biblical cosmogonies except Psalm 104 and Genesis 1, John Day thinks it characterizes even the cosmogony in Psalm 104. Bernard F. Batto is, however, the only contemporary biblical scholar I have

been able to find who continues to think it characterizes Genesis 1 as well. While Batto admits that the *tanninim* have been demythologized in Genesis 1, he critiques Levenson's reading of the demythologization of the waters as follows: "But this fails to reckon with 'the Abyss' (*tehom*) itself as P's primary symbol for the primordial arch-foe of the Creator in Genesis 1." See Batto, *Slaying the Dragon: Mythmaking in the Biblical Tradition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1992), 213, n. 19.

⁴³Lynn White, Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155 (March 10, 1967): 1203-1207. Reprinted as Appendix I (pp. 125-44 Arnold Toynbee, in *The Toynbee-Ikeda Dialogue* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1976); Daisetz T. Suzuki, "The Role of Nature in Zen Buddhism," *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 22 (1953): 292; Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972); Ian MacHarg, "The Plight," in *The Environmental Crisis: Man's Struggle to Live with Himself*, ed. Harold Helfrich (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970); and David Suzuki, *Subdue the Earth*, the third video in *A Planet for the Taking*, an eight-part series produced by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (1986). For a wide survey of this critique in recent literature, see Cameron Wybrow's excellent study, *The Bible, Baconianism, and Mastery over Nature: The Old Testament and Its modern Misreading* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), esp. "Introduction: The Mastery Hypothesis" (pp. 3-35).

⁴⁵White, 133.

⁴⁶Ibid., 135.

⁴⁷Ibid., 132.

⁴⁸Both dimensions of the charge are lucidly addressed by Wybrow in *The Bible, Baconianism, and Mastery over Nature*. His careful examination of the understanding of "nature" and "dominion" in pagan antiquity (chaps. 1 and 2), in the Bible (chaps. 3 and 4), and at the start of the modern scientific era (chap. 5) serves as perhaps the most comprehensive rebuttal of the ecological objections in the literature. Wybrow, however, unwisely follows the idiosyncratic opinion of biblical scholar James Barr in disassociating the *imago Dei* from the mandate to dominion in Genesis 1.

⁴⁹From the *Discourse on Method*, part 6. In René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980), 33.

⁵⁰See Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), chap. 3: "God and the World" (esp. pp. 63-78 on the monarchial model of God). A similar argument is articulated in McFague, "Models of God for an Ecological, Evolutionary Era: God as Mother of the Universe," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, ed. Robert J. Russell et al (Vatican City State: Vatican City Observatory; Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 249-271.

⁵¹McFague, *Models of God*, 68.

⁵²Ibid., 61.

⁵³Ibid., 69. McFague herself does not distinguish these as typically male and female experiences of God. But this distinction would be consistent with her argument.

⁵⁴Ibid., 69-87. For God as Mother giving birth to the universe, see McFague, "Models of God for an Ecological, Evolutionary Era: God as Mother of the Universe," esp. 255-262.

⁵⁵James L. Crenshaw, *Story and Faith: A Guide to the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan; London: Collier Macmillan, 1986), 39.

⁵⁶Tamara Cohen Eskenazi, "Torah as Narrative and Narrative as Torah," in *Old Testament Interpretation: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. James Luther Mays, David L. Petersen, and Kent Harold Richards (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 17.

⁵⁷Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 143, 145.

⁵⁸Crenshaw, 61.

⁵⁹Ibid., 60. It is difficult to understand the persistence of this portrayal of God or the widespread assumption that it characterizes the creation account in Genesis 1. Apart from the fact that this assumption may be rooted in the notion of the combat myth, which involves the imposition of order on recalcitrant "chaos," the perception of the priestly creation story as one of invariant order *par excellence* may go back to a peculiarity of the history of critical biblical scholarship. In this scholarship, the literary style of the so-called "Priestly" document (of which Genesis 1 is a part) has historically been contrasted with that of the so-called "Yahwist" document (which includes the Genesis 2 creation story). Sean McEvenue's survey of scholarly evaluations of the narrative style of the priestly writer notes the frequency with which terms like "pedantic," "stereotyped," and "monotonous" arise in the works of prominent scholars like Julius Wellhausen, S. R. Driver, Gerhard von Rad, and Claus Westermann (see Sean E. McEvenue, *The Narrative Style of the Priestly Writer* [Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971], 5-8). Although McEvenue does not deal explicitly with Genesis 1, it is a short step from the assumption of a pedantic, monotonous, and artificial literary style for the priestly writing in general to the claim that the priestly creation story is characterized by repetitive order and imposed symmetry. But this is, of course, merely a supposition on my part.

⁶⁰Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, *Rhetoric and Biblical Interpretation* (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1987; Almond Press, 1990), chap. 6: "Genesis and Power: An Analysis of the Biblical Story of Creation," 103-125.

⁶¹Ibid., 117.

⁶²It is intriguing that apart from biblical scholars who often claim to find in Genesis 1 the very model of divine power that White and McFague decry, many — if not most — Christian theologians unproblematically assume this same model for their understanding of God as Creator and the world as created. Michael Welker has helpfully described this theological model as a generalized hierarchical picture

of production, causation, and dependence (Welker, "What is Creation? Rereading Genesis 1 and 2," *Theology Today* 48/1 [April 1991]: 56-71). Citing a number of prominent theological definitions of "creation," Welker demonstrates that there is widespread consensus in the Christian tradition that creation (whether act or product) consists in a simple "pattern of power" (p. 59). As *act* or *process*, creation involves being unilaterally caused or produced by a transcendent reality, while as *product*, it involves absolute dependence on this transcendent reality. Not only is this a remarkably thin and abstract notion of creation, but as Welker points out, it is widely assumed that such a notion of the God-creature relationship adequately characterizes the biblical creation account in Genesis. Like Welker, I argue that this is simply false. The biblical picture is significantly more complex.

⁶³ Ever since the original proposals of Bernhard Stade (*Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols. [Tübingen: Mohr, 1905-11], 1:349) and Friedrich Schwally ("Die biblischen Schöpfungsberichte," *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 9 [1906]: 159-175), it is sometimes claimed by biblical scholars (especially those oriented to tradition criticism) that the Genesis 1:1-2:3 creation story derives from an older *Tatbericht* or deed-oriented report of creation (which described God's actions in creating) edited together with a later *Wortbericht* or word-oriented report (which introduced the notion of God speaking creation into being). One possible evidence for this is the two types of execution reports in the text. Perhaps the first type is derived from the *Wortbericht*, while the second is derived from the *Tatbericht*.

⁶⁴ Although this variety is characteristic of the Hebrew text, it is not always evident in the LXX. Indeed, the LXX of Genesis 1 often harmonizes and systematizes the variations of the MT, sometimes supplying missing items or arranging them in a more consistent pattern.

⁶⁵ We could say that the first type of fiat names only the object and not the subject of the action (as the second does). This would, however, be a comment about the force of the text's *meaning*, and not technically a comment on the grammar of the Hebrew text. Grammatically, the difference is that the first type has the creature in question as the subject of the verb *to be* (and in one case as the subject of a passive verb, "be gathered"), whereas the second type has the creature as subject of some other (active) verb, which implies that creature's participation in creative activity.

⁶⁶ Henri Blocher traces the observation of this symmetry or correspondence back to Johann Gottfried von Herder. See Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis*, trans. David G. Peterson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 51.

⁶⁷ First suggested by M. J. Larange, "Hexameron (Genese 1 a 2,4)," *Revue Biblique* 5 (1896): 382. Cited in Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 51, n. 45.

⁶⁸ This is not to deny that *tohû wabohû* may also function as a hendiadys, meaning something like "an empty wasteland" and certainly has an onomatopoeic sense (which might be conveyed by expressions like "hurly burly" or "helter

skelter"). The phrase may well function on multiple levels.

⁶⁹ This reading of Genesis 2:1 is prefigured in the famous medieval distinction between God's work of separation (*opus distinctionis*) on days 1-3 and his work of adornment or embellishment (*opus ornatus*) on days 4-6. (See, for example, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.65, a. answer to objection 1). The medieval distinction, however, is between separation and adornment (as opposed to filling) and seems to be based on the Vulgate's mistranslation (following the LXX) of Hebrew *saba'* (actually *s'ba'am*, "their host") by the Latin *ornatus*. It seems that the translators of the LXX misread *saba'* ("host," "company," or "army") as *sebi* ("beauty," "glory," or "adornment"). The NIV tries to capture something of both senses in its translation of *saba'* in Genesis 2:1 as "vast array."

⁷⁰ Bernard W. Anderson observed this progression in his excellent essay, "The Priestly Creation Story: A Stylistic Study," chap. 3 in his *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994). It should be noted that Anderson uses the word "panel" in his essay (which was first published with a slightly different title in 1977) to refer to each of God's eight creative acts (pp. 45-46), while I have used "panel" to refer to the two corresponding triads of days.

⁷¹ Yet the (unexpected) creation of vegetation at this point makes perfect sense (in retrospect) as a necessary preparation to God granting this vegetation as food to animals and humans on day 6 (note that days 3 and 6 are parallel in terms of the architectonic scheme of the chapter).

⁷² Thus both the last creative act on the first "panel" (days 1-3) and the first creative act on the second "panel" (days 4-6) overlap the panels in a symmetrical asymmetry.

⁷³ Another case of literary variation that involves overlap of boundaries is the threefold occurrence of "blessing" in the text. Twice God blesses living, organic creatures with fertility, the flying creatures and water dwellers on day 5 and humanity on day 6, but there is surprisingly no blessing mentioned for land animals. Instead, we find that the seventh day is blessed, though this is blessing for sanctification, not for fertility. Not only is the blessing of the seventh day an unexpected variation, but it serves rhetorically to connect the seventh day with the prior six days of God's creative activity, even though it stands structurally outside the two panels of six creative days.

⁷⁴ This literary variation probably serves rhetorically to emphasize the special, climactic character of days 6 and 7, highlighting (respectively) the creation of humanity in God's image and the completion of God's creative work.

⁷⁵ This is because so many conflicting (ad hoc) explanations for particular variations have been suggested by commentators. It is thus hard to know whether the explanations really explain the variations or exist primarily in the mind of the commentators.

⁷⁶ Presumably primary and secondary agency are compatible. There have,

however, been other explanations, for example, that the creature in question was unable to act, since it did not possess the requisite generative powers. This interpretation goes back to Rabbinic sources. See Wybrow, *The Bible, Baconianism, and Mastery over Nature*, 122.

⁷⁷ Without intending to bore the reader (since the variations could be multiplied indefinitely), we could note further that in three of the four cases that God's fiat does *not* invite a creature to actively participate in creation, the verb *to be* is used (God invites a creature to exist), whereas in one case (God's third creative act) a different verb is used (God calls the waters *to be gathered* to one place).

⁷⁸ There are many biblical passages which describe the subjectivity or responsiveness of creation to God. For a discussion of these passages, see Brian J. Walsh, Marianne B. Karsh and Nik Ansell, "Trees, Forestry, and the Responsiveness of Creation," *Cross Currents* 44/2 (1994): 149-162; Wybrow, *The Bible, Baconianism, and Mastery over Nature*, chap. 3: "Nature in the Old Testament: Desacralized but Not De-animated" (pp. 109-134); Terence E. Fretheim, "Nature's Praise of God in the Psalms," *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 16-30; and Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, 147-152.

⁷⁹ The term "strange attractor" was coined by David Ruelle and Floris Takens in a 1971 paper called "On the Nature of Turbulence," in *Communications in Mathematical Physics* 20 (1971): 167-192. Good introductions to chaos theory include James Gleick, *Chaos: Making a New Science* (New York: Viking, 1987); and Ian Stewart, *Does God Play Dice? The Mathematics of Chaos* (Cambridge, MA and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1989). George Lakoff's marvelous book, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (Chicago and London: University of California Press, 1987) goes well beyond mathematics and chaos theory to show connections between the findings of a large number of disciplines on what he calls "motivated" (p. 96) patterning, distinct from the traditional false alternatives of either random/stochastic or predictable/deterministic patterns. By articulating examples of such "motivated" patterning in the world studied by biology (see chapter 11: "Species"), Lakoff implicitly reopens the old question, long laid to rest by deterministic science, of intelligent design in nature (see esp. chaps. 4-8 in Part I: "Categories and Cognitive Models").

⁸⁰ Beside myself, Terence E. Fretheim is the only other biblical scholar I know of who has foregrounded the risk-taking, power-sharing character of God in Genesis 1, thus challenging traditional readings of the text. See both his comments on Genesis 1 in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 1, ed. David L. Petersen (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), "The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," and his beautiful little-known essay called "Creator, Creature, and Co-Creation in Genesis 1-2," in *All Things New: Essays in Honor of Roy A. Harrisville*, ed. Arland J. Hultgren, Donald H. Juel and Jack D. Kingbury, Word and World Supplement Series (St. Paul, MN: Word and World, 1992), 11-20. Although the rhetorical reading of Genesis 1 presented in this paper was developed before I read either of Fretheim's works cited above, I was already fundamentally indebted

to his classic *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) for his insightful elucidation of the biblical portrayal of God as passionately involved with the created order.

⁸¹ The first two of these three commands/invitations are rhetorically distinguished by a cognate accusative construction in the Hebrew, involving an assonance between the verb and its object in each case (thus v. 11 says literally "let the earth green with greenery" or "let the earth vegetate vegetation"). William P. Brown ("Divine Act and the Art of Persuasion in Genesis 1." in *History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of John H. Hayes*, ed. M. Patrick Graham, William P. Brown and Jeffrey K. Kuan [Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1993], 24, 27) calls this feature *figura etymologica* and detects it at two other places in Genesis 1. The first is 1:15 ("let them be *for lights* in the expanse of the sky *to give light*") and the second (based on his reconstruction of a lost consonant from the Hebrew *Vorlage*, suggested by the LXX) is 1:20, which would make two occurrences in this verse ("let the waters *cause swarms of living creatures to swarm and cause flyers to fly about* in the expanse of the sky"). Brown defends his reconstruction of the *Vorlage* of Genesis 1 at greater length in *Structure, Role, Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1-2:3* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 139-140, n. 29.

⁸² Indeed, all God's acts of filling (the sky and sea with birds and fish on day 5 and the land with animals and humans on day 6) are derivative in this sense, coming as they do after the earth's creative activity.

⁸³ I am not claiming that the text assigns any autonomy (ontological or otherwise) to creatures, since all the "divine" or "god-like" functions of creatures that I have enumerated are God-given and delegated. Yet I want to take the rhetoric of the text seriously in its portrayal of creaturely power.

⁸⁴ This asymmetry could be counted as another variation in the "fiat" pattern. And, like fractals, there is further variation *within* this variation. Thus, on days 1 and 3, God names that which has been separated (light and darkness are named "day" and "night" in 1:5; the dry land and the waters are named "earth" and "seas" in 1:10). On day 2, however, God does not name that which has been separated, but the separator itself (the expanse that divides the waters is named "sky" in 1:8). A further variation is that the naming itself occurs at different places within the fiat pattern (twice after and once before the evaluation report). This is simply further evidence that the text's "order" is highly complex and flexible.

⁸⁵ Here I follow Phyllis Tribble regarding the significance of naming in Genesis 2-3 (*God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], chap. 4: "A Love Story Gone Awry," esp. 133-134). My one disagreement with Tribble would be that I do not think the power involved in naming inevitably involves subjugation. It does, however, involve a power differential between the one naming and the one named.

⁸⁶ This reading certainly contravenes any interpretation of Genesis 1 that claims that humans are absolutely unique among creatures in imaging God. The

picture given in the text is considerably more nuanced than that.

⁸⁷ Apart from the fact that the Genesis text itself associates humanity as "image of God" with the mandate to rule (in 1:26-28), there is a significant literature in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia which applies the term primarily to *kings* (and to a lesser degree to *priests*). In other words, the term "image of God" with the mandate to rule (in 1:26-28), there is a significant literature in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia which applies the term primarily to *kings* (and to a lesser degree to *priests*). In other words, the term "image of God" designates those who are called to represent the divine on earth, a usage which clearly suggests power and privilege. See Phyllis A. Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them": Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *Harvard Theological Review* 74 (1981):129-159; D. J. A. Clines, "The Image of God in Man," *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53-103; and Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Image of God and the Flood: Some New Developments," in *Studies in Jewish Education and Judaica in Honor of Louis Newman*, ed. Alexander M. Shapiro and Burton I. Cohen (New York: KTAV, 1984), 169-182.

⁸⁸ Patrick and Scult actually claim that there are no creaturely actors at all (human or otherwise) in the Genesis 1 creation account, whereas the text itself clearly represents the earth (or land) as an active participant in creation (1:22).

⁸⁹ To illustrate the range of interpretations possible on this point, note that Francis Watson (in *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 150) argues for a fundamental *congruence* (rather than contrast) between Genesis 2 (the quest for a human dialogue partner for 'adam) and Genesis 1 (God's quest for a human dialogue partner). My understanding of the relationship between these two chapters is more complex than either of these options.

⁹⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, Book XIII, chap. 36. This absence has been noted by many biblical scholars, though few draw the requisite conclusions from it.

⁹¹ Contra Watson (*Text, Church and World*, 143; 313, n. 3) who claims that God's rest is necessitated by the labor implicated in the metaphor of God as artisan constructing the cosmos. I would argue that God's "rest" follows naturally on the heels of God's (royal/parental) delegation of responsible stewardship to humanity.

⁹² God's "rest" does not here mean cessation of action, only that the initial conditions of a meaningful world are completed. Indeed, God continues to act, upholding the universe by divine power and effecting deliverance from bondage and sin. Thus in the New Testament, Jesus defends healing on the Sabbath because the Father also works (salvifically) on the Sabbath (John 5:19). Comments Blocher: "God's sabbath, which marks the end of creation, but does not tie God's hands, is therefore coextensive with history." (Blocher, *In the Beginning*, 57.) Sometimes Christian theologians have referred to the era of human history as the *eighth* day of creation, but this is unnecessary in the context of the Genesis narrative which knows no conclusion to the seventh day.

⁹³ Although it has often been traditional for biblical scholars to treat these *tôl'dôt* headings as conclusions (and one still finds such treatment today), a careful reading shows that not all of them could plausibly function as conclusions, whereas they all function very well as headings or superscriptions. The classic argument for this is found in Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 301-305 (from chap. 11: "The Priestly Work," 293-325).

⁹⁴ Note Francis Watson's similar claim that the Genesis 1 creation story "must determine the theme and scope of the story that follows. The 'beginning' referred to at the outset is *also* the beginning of a book, and engenders in the reader's mind the expectation . . . of a coherent plot" (Watson, *Text, Church and World*, 153).

⁹⁵ Even the nuances of *tôl'dôt* contribute to this picture. A plural noun formed from the verb *yalad*, "to bear," "to beget," *tôl'dôt* is a developmental, birthing word, and its placement in Genesis 2:4a suggests by its connotations a parental, nurturing picture of God.

⁹⁶ A theological analysis of divine power quite congenial to my own is found in Kyle A. Pasewark, *A Theology of Power: Being beyond Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), esp. chap. 4: "Power and Communication of Efficacy" (pp. 186-235). It is interesting that Pasewark traces the notion of power as the "communication of efficacy" (a non-zero sum notion) back to Martin Luther's description of God's creative power in Genesis 1.

⁹⁷ For a discussion of the normative character of Genesis 1 in relation to the violence which pervades Scripture, see Middleton and Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be*, chap. 6, esp. 127-140.

⁹⁸ Again, I follow Phyllis Trible (see *supra*, n. 85). George W. Ramsey disputes Trible's interpretation of this verse (and her claims concerning the significance of naming, in general) in "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 24-35. While Ramsey is certainly correct that naming does not necessarily imply domination or control in the Bible (as Trible seems to say), this does not address a nuanced variant of Trible's point (which I would like to advance), namely that naming is typically an act involving asymmetrical power (that is, one with superior power usually does the naming). Whether that power will be used for domination or not is a separate issue. Genesis 1 certainly suggests that it need not be so used.

⁹⁹ This point is also noted in Richard J. Clifford, "Creation in the Hebrew Bible," in *Physics, Philosophy, and Theology: A Common Quest for Understanding*, ed. Robert J. Russell et al (Vatican City State: Vatican City Observatory/ Notre Dame, IL: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 165.

¹⁰⁰ Perhaps the interpretive process is also at its best an act of loving power, an attempt to image God, characterized also by risk.