

EVE AND ADAM – HANDOUT

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Yuval Noah Arari, *Homo Deus* (2017)

1. It all began about 70,000 years ago, when the Cognitive Revolution enabled Sapiens to start talking about things that existed only in their own imagination. For the following 60,000 years Sapiens wove many fictional webs, but these remained small and local.
2. Stories about ancestral spirits and precious seashells still gave Sapiens a huge advantage, because they allowed hundreds and sometimes even thousands of Sapiens to cooperate effectively, which was far more than Neanderthals or chimpanzees could do. Yet as long as Sapiens remained hunter-gatherers, they could not cooperate on a truly massive scale, because it was impossible to feed a city or a kingdom by hunting and gathering. Consequently the spirits, fairies and demons of the Stone Age were relatively weak entities.
3. Farmers believed in stories about great gods. They built temples to their favourite god, held festivals in his honour, offered him sacrifices, and gave him lands, tithes and presents. In the first cities of ancient Sumer, about 6,000 years ago, the temples were not just centres of worship, but also the most important political and economic hubs. The Sumerian gods fulfilled a function analogous to modern brands and corporations.
4. Prior to the invention of writing, stories were confined by the limited capacity of human brains. You couldn't invent overly complex stories which people couldn't remember. With writing you could suddenly create extremely long and intricate stories, which were stored on tablets and papyri rather than in human heads.
5. Compared to the Sumerian gods, not to mention the Stone Age spirits, the gods of ancient Egypt were truly powerful entities that founded cities, raised armies and controlled the lives of millions of humans, cows and crocodiles. It may sound strange to credit imaginary entities with building or controlling things. But nowadays we habitually say that the United States built the first nuclear bomb, that China built the Three Gorges Dam or that Google is building an autonomous car. Why not say, then, that pharaoh built a reservoir and Sobek dug a canal?
6. Fictions enable us to cooperate better.
7. Fiction isn't bad. It is vital. Without commonly accepted stories about things like money, states or corporations, no complex human society can function.

Jack Zipe, *The Irresistible Fairy Tale* (2012)

8. Critics tend to use heuristics and critical methodologies to foreclose the meanings of stories.
 - 8.1. all utterances are essentially dialogic because they depend on the interplay of varied, and at times opposed, meanings
 - 8.2. all language usage is a product of conflicting social forces that engender constant reinterpretation.
9. Stories
 - 9.1. do not belong to storytellers and story listeners because all stories are "reassemblies of fragments on loan" and "depend on shared narrative sources."⁵
 - 9.2. Stories not only contribute to the making of our narrative selves but also weave the threads of social relationships and make life social.
 - 9.3. there is no such thing as a pure genre, and all tale types have a symbiotic relationship to one another.
 - 9.4. Need of a dialogic mode of interpretation so that all voices can be heard, and open up a story for various interpretations and possible uses.

- 9.5. Analyze how stories breathe as they animate, assemble, entertain, and enlighten, and also deceive and divide people.”⁶
- 9.6. The primary lesson from storytellers is that they learn to work with stories that are not theirs but there, as realities. Master storytellers know that stories breathe.”⁷
- 10. These primary tales enabled humans to invent and reinvent their lives—and create and re-create gods, divine powers, fairies, demons, fates, monsters, witches, and other supernatural characters and forces. An other world is very much alive in fairy tales, thanks to our capacity as storytellers.
- 11. Almost all storytellers strive to make themselves and their stories relevant, and if they succeed, those stories will stick in the minds of their listeners, who may tell these stories later and contribute to the replication of stories that form cultural patterns
- 12. Telling effective, relevant stories became a vital quality for anyone who wanted power to determine and influence social practices.
- 13. Throughout human history, there has always been a tension between
 - 13.1. groups wanting to control speech
 - 13.2. and the way individuals have used speech to know themselves and the world.
- 14. A tale becomes traditional not by virtue of being created, but by being retold and accepted; transmission means interaction, and this process is not explained by isolating just one side. A tale “created”—that is, invented by an individual author—may somehow become “myth” if it becomes traditional, to be used as a means of communication in subsequent generations, usually with some distortions and reelaborations.
- 15. Fables are not preachy or moralistic in a strict sense because they expose the contradictions of human behavior more than they dictate principles of behavior. They explore the human condition rather than instruct how one must behave. They explain more than they sermonize.
- 16. Tales [...] breathe and are vigorous, and as they are passed on to us through traditions of storytelling, they almost assume a life of their own [...]
 - 16.1. as memes—a concept developed by Dawkins in his 1976 book, *The Selfish Gene*.
 - 16.2. Dawkins: “all life evolves by the differential survival of replicating entities. The gene, the DNA molecule, happens to be the replicating entity that prevails on our own planet.
 - 16.3. There is another replicator, which he calls a meme, a unit of cultural transmission.
 - 16.4. Examples of memes are tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of making pots or of building arches.
 - 16.5. Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense can be called imitation.
 - 16.6. [M]emes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically. When you plant a fertile meme in my mind you literally parasitize my brain, turning it into a vehicle for the meme’s propagation in just the way that a virus may parasitize the genetic mechanism of a host cell.
 - 16.7. As with genes the replication process is imperfect and errors have a creative function, serving as grist for the mill of cultural change, much as mutations offer the genetic variation that natural selection acts upon

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17. Tension in the narrative

17.1. A benevolent God

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ Out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

17.2. Prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge with consequence of death

¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.'

17.3. Serpent: you will not die – God is jealous

³Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God say, "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden"?' ²The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, "You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die." ' ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'

17.4. Indeed God seems to be fearful at the end

²² Then the Lord God said, 'See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever'— ²³therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

18. Who is the most 'suitable' helper?

¹⁸ Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'

²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

'This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.'

²⁴Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.

19. The LORD God said, "It is not good for the human to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" ... but for the human no suitable helper was found. [Genesis 2:18 & 20](#)

20. Ezer kenegdo—"a helper suitable for him"—is used in reference to the woman in [Genesis 2](#) without any narrow qualifications, prescribed limits, or cultural restrictions. It is not specified in [Genesis 2](#) how the woman was to express and apply her help towards her husband.

21. The main thrust of the story however is that they are not a suitable helper to each other

21.1. They fail each other in eating the tree

21.2. They fail each other in dealing with their shame

21.3. They fail each other in trying to accuse each other

22. In Hebrew, the word for "helper" used in [Genesis 2:18](#) and [20](#) is ezer, and it is consistently used in the Old Testament in the context of vitally important and powerful acts of rescue and support.

23. Sixteen times it is used in reference to God as a helper (ezer)

23.1. Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. [Deuteronomy 33:29a](#)

²⁹ Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you,
a people saved by the LORD,
the shield of your help,
and the sword of your triumph!

Your enemies shall come fawning to you,
and you shall tread on their backs.

23.2. We wait in hope for the LORD; He is our help and shield. [Psalm 33:20](#)

²⁰ Our soul waits for the LORD;
he is our help and shield.

24. And here we come to the passage which often goes unnoticed: the tunic of skins

²¹And the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them

25. But this detail points to a key drive of the story

Mark A. Snoeberger¹

26. Adam and Eve begin their primitive existence both naked and without shame.

27. Nakedness [in the OT] is uniformly associated with negative ideas such as

27.1. poverty (Job 24:7, 10),

27.2. vulnerability (Job 1:21; Eccl 5:15), and

27.3. violent exposure/humiliation (1 Sam 19:24?; Job 22:6; 26:6; Isa 20:2–4; 58:7; Hos 2:5; Amos 2:16; and Micah 1:8).

28. The idea of guilt in Scripture and theology is coldly objective and legal in nature and may be defined quite simply as liability to punishment.

28.1. “indebtedness” and “making someone pay,”

28.2. whether by “suffering,” “restitution,” or “compensation.”

28.3. To be guilty is to be obliged to pay a penalty for some crime.

28.4. One either is objectively guilty or objectively not guilty. Feelings are irrelevant.

28.5. The remedy for guilt, theologically speaking, is

i. propitiation (the satisfaction of some legal standard by means of acceptable payment)

ii. and/or expiation (the formal removal of liability to punishment).

29. Unlike guilt, the state of shame is subjective and acutely felt.

29.1. Shame involves a sense of embarrassment, humiliation, insecurity, or vulnerability,

29.2. usually in view of the public disclosure of some ethical breach or indecency.

29.3. It carries the sense of exposure: the exposure of one’s guilt is a common reason for shame.

30. There are two coverings mentioned in the third chapter of Genesis:

30.1. a failed attempt at coverings made from fig leaves and

30.2. a superior covering of skins.

30.3. Loincloth vs. Tunic

30.4. leaves are inferior to skins as a choice of material for clothing

30.5. a real remedy for sin that is present the second covering, but absent in the first.

30.6. Adam and Eve made their own loincloth but God their tunic

30.7. In the first instance there is just a frenzied attempt to cover shame. In the latter we have confession, forgiveness, absolution, and hope, the first in a long series of biblical “coverings” in the wake of atonement in Scripture (Job 14:17; Neh 4:5; Ps 85:2; and esp. Ps 32:1 [with Rom 4:7]).

30.8. Adam and Eve acted [pathetically] by covering themselves - the act of covering demonstrated God’s mercy in concealing their shame and mitigating further harm.

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¹ Mark A. Snoeberger, “Nakedness And Coverings in Genesis 3: What They Are and Why It Matters”, BJSJ 22 (2017): 21–33

31. The earliest Christian commentators saw clothing as punitive in nature: Augustine saw clothes as a punishment for pride; Origen and Ephrem the Syrian as a reminder of mortality; Gregory of Nyssa as an ugly symbol of the disorder wrought by sin.
32. Later commentators have tended to see much more of divine favor in the garments, interpreting them as tokens of divine kindness (e.g., protection from physical and interpersonal vulnerabilities) and reason to hope for yet greater graces
33. John Chrysostom, Homely on Genesis 18.1
- 33.1. God showed them great pity and had mercy on their fall: seeing them covered in confusion and ignorant of what to do to avoid being naked and feeling ashamed, he makes garments of skin for them and clothes them in them. [...].
- 33.2. I mean, when he rendered them liable to bodily necessities for the future, stripping them of the angelic way of life and its freedom from suffering, he later arranged for clothes for human beings out of sheep's fleece for no other reason than that they should have covering and that this rational creature should not live his life in nakedness and ugliness just like brute beasts. [...]
- 33.3. But the Lord, who is always interested in the salvation of our souls, did not turn away his eyes from the sad state in which our first parents were reduced, and he gave them a garment whose simplicity alone was a memory of their fall. And the Lord God made Adam and his wife with tunics of skin, and clothed them. Observe here, I ask you, with what condescension the Scripture is proportioned to our weakness. But, I said it, and I repeat it, one must always give it a sense worthy of God. Thus this word: God made tunics, must be taken in this sense that he commanded that these tunics existed; and he wanted our first parents to cover them, so that this garment would constantly remind them of their disobedience.
34. St Augustine
- 34.1. In *De Gen. c. man.*, Augustine makes three references to the tunics of skins (*tunicae pelliceae*). In II,21,32 he holds that the skin coats symbolize mortality, for nothing is more appropriate to symbolize the mortal body than the skins taken from dead beasts.²
- 34.2. In *Confes. VII, 18,24* Augustine writes that Christ “became weak by his sharing in our ‘coat of skin’ (*infirmam divinitatem ex participatione tunicae pelliciae nostrae*)”.
35. Origen
- 35.1. in *Hom. Jer. 18,9*, he quotes, probably from an apocryphal book of Ezekiel, the promise God made through the prophets regarding his nearness to men: “I am closer to them than their tunic of skin” (*ἐγγιῶ αὐτοῖς ἢ ὁ χιτῶν τοῦ χρωτὸς αὐτῶν*).
- 35.2. God never abandons human beings, but it is human beings who abandon God, and who take distance from God, whereas God meets with those that come toward Him
36. Clothing is God's gift of mercy,
- 36.1. to alleviate their shame by concealing the constant reminder of their sin and
- 36.2. (2) to restrain to some degree the continuing effects of sin.
- 36.3. This clothing event was not symbolic of the redress of guilt with a sacrifice of atonement, but [...] a protection from vulnerability and the mitigation of shame.
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37. God is the real helper
- i. Only with God's help they can assuage their shame
- ii. Parallel with the protection given to Cain
- a. _____

² Tamdiu autem in paradiso fuerunt isti, quamvis iam sub sententia damnantis Dei, donec ventum esset ad pelliceas tunicas, id est ad huius vitae mortalitatem. Quo enim maiore indicio potuit significari mors quam sentimus in corpore, quam pellibus quae mortuis pecoribus detrahi solent?

¹³Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! ¹⁴Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.' ¹⁵Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him. ¹⁶Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

38. What is the meaning of the curses?

38.1. Pain in childbearing, toxic relational dynamics, the toiling required by work, death are expressive of our situation of insecurity, vulnerability, embarrassment and shame – as soon as they become conscious of themselves, human beings are also conscious that this is their condition – it is our human condition.

39. This story is a way of coping with this condition

39.1. Seeing it not as without remedy

39.2. Identifying the 'suitable' help needed to deal with it.

39.3. Rather than seeing the garden as what we have lost (it never existed) we can see it as what God wants to lead us to

39.4. God is the real helper because he is committed to

i. Change relations

ii. Change our relation to knowledge of good and evil

iii. Help us to overcome our shame

iv. Transform what we see as curse into blessing

40. The garden of Eden never existed in the past but it can exist in the future – and God is committed to create it for us.