The book of Genesis addresses a question which environmental philosophers address today: is it appropriate for humans to eat meat? In Genesis 1, God provides fruit for man to eat and green herbs for the animals; God does not authorize meat-eating. Later, in Genesis 6-9, God wipes out human civilization with a flood but protects Noah and his family in a floating ark, along with enough animals to repopulate the earth. After Noah and his ark save the animals, God sanctions meat-eating for Noah’s family and their descendants. This puzzling turn from vegetarianism to meat-eating is usually explained as a concession to human appetite. But God’s sanctioning of meat-eating should not be dismissed as a mere concession. In Genesis 1-9, every reference to eating or the human diet occupies a central place in the narrative. In Genesis 1, God’s only direction to the humans and animals is their respective diets, what God has given them to eat; in Genesis 2, God’s only direction to the humans in Eden is that they may eat from any tree except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad—the tree from which the man and the woman subsequently eat; in Genesis 9, God establishes civil law, and his first commandment to Noah’s family is that they may eat animals, but the blood of animals they shall not eat. Whereas man’s desire to eat meat is never stated in this narrative, the text does state that God originally authorized a diet of fruit for humans. A thoughtful interpretation of the text requires an understanding of why God instituted a plant-based diet in Genesis 1 and what compelled him to allow man’s diet to change.

This paper will explain how God allows meat-eating in Genesis 9 to correct human violence, establish just political bonds between humans, and provide instruction for humans concerning the sanctity of life, especially human life. First, I will demonstrate how other

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1 For example, the commentary on Genesis published by the Jewish Publication Society describes the sanctioning of meat-eating as a mere “concession to human weakness.” See Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Galliard: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 60.
attempts to analyze Genesis with questions from environmental ethics, namely that of Lynn White Jr., have insufficiently read the text in its proper context. Second, I will explain what the creation account in Genesis 1 teaches about humans, animals, and the food God gives them to eat. Third, I will explain how humans reject the life God creates for them and why God decides to blot out human society with a flood and begin a new society that includes civil law and meat-eating. Finally, I will demonstrate how meat-eating is an integral part of God’s response to human evil in Genesis 9.

Previous analyses of Genesis by environmental philosophers have failed to read the creation accounts of Genesis in its proper context of the Genesis narrative, the Torah, and the literature of the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East. Lynn White Jr.’s “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” argues that an anthropocentric account of creation in Genesis enabled the Latin Christians who inherited the Torah from Judaism to lead the world in manipulating nature through machinery and technology, starting in the Middle Ages. White, in analyzing the creation account adopted by Christianity, interprets Genesis 1-2 as teaching that no nonhuman creation “had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes.” He analyzes Genesis 2 as the Judeo-Christian version of the creation accounts found in many cultures, focusing on how the Genesis myth provides ideological support for the exploitation of nature that is indifferent to all creatures’ needs except those of humans. Like White’s approach, most discussion on the evaluation of the Bible for its teachings on nature have concentrated on the first few chapters of Genesis.

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2 Machina ex Deo: Essays in the Dynamism of Western Culture (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968), 80-86.
3 Ibid., 86.
Evaluations of Genesis 1-2 which isolate the text from its context will ultimately fail to understand Genesis in its own terms. First, Genesis is a narrative; it is the beginning of the story of Israel and the Torah, a word which means “teaching.” Many of the important phrases and motifs of Genesis 1—such as the blessing to be fruitful and multiply, subduing the land, the importance of separation and dietary ordinances, and the preparation of the land—appear later in the stories of the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the Mosaic Law. The creation account of Genesis, then, must be read as a part of this national story and a lesson from the Torah’s teachings: it should not be analyzed as a mere account—the Hebrew version of the Near Eastern creation myths—without considering how it functions as an integral part of the Torah. In fact, this particular account of creation is unique to the Torah; other books of the Bible—the Psalms, Job, and Isaiah—reference a creation epic that Genesis 1 never references. Likewise, none of the books in the Hebrew Bible reference specific terms and actions from Genesis 1-3. Genesis 1 also references another creation story from Near Eastern literature: Marduk’s battle against Tiamat in the Enuma Elish. Understanding its comparison and contrast to this text, and other ancient Near Eastern texts, is also crucial for understanding Genesis in its own terms.

One important tool for reading these chapters in their own terms is understanding how the text uses the number seven. First, seven connotes completion or perfection. In Hebrew, as well as the Near Eastern Ugaritic and Akkadian languages, seven days were “considered a perfect
period… in which to develop an important work.” In Genesis, the most obvious example of this connotation is the seven days it takes for God to complete the creation of the heavens and the earth. Furthermore, Genesis emphasizes subjects by repeating a word seven times, or a multiple of seven, in a text. The first example is the Hebrew word ma’ym, “water,” which is used seven times over the course of Genesis 1:6-10. The text employs this sevenfold usage up through Genesis 9, when the word berith, “covenant,” is used seven times. This literary device clues the reader in on how to read the text; some of these clues, as we will soon observe, elucidate the themes of the text.

Genesis 1 describes the creation of the world humans know and occupy. First, God brings order and distinction to the earth, which is “without form, and void” at the beginning of the chapter. In the first three days, God creates the realms that the creatures made on days four through six occupy. On day one, God distinguishes the day and the night where the lights made on the fourth day move about. On the second day, God separates the waters below from the sky above where the fish and fowl created on the fourth day live. On the third day, God distinguishes the seas from the dry land where the animals and humans created on the sixth day live. God begins by creating the distinguished habitats of his sentient creatures; then he creates the animals, a process which culminates in and focuses on the creation of humans. In order to understand what Genesis 1 teaches about humanity—and their relationship to animals—the reader must understand how humans relate to God’s pattern of creation in Genesis 1.

In the seven days of creation, the first, second, and third day establish the principal theme of the chapter: arranging the initially chaotic world so that it may be seen as inherently good. To

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understand the importance of this theme, Genesis should be compared with another creation account that Genesis 1 references: the Babylonian *Enuma Elish*. The Babylonian mythologies depict Marduk, or another powerful god, conquering Tiamat, the chaotic ocean, in a great battle, slicing Tiamat into two halves: the waters above and those below.⁹ In the *Enuma Elish*, the chaotic waters above become the sky, and Marduk guards these waters from escaping to the world below.¹⁰ Likewise, on the second day of creation in Genesis, God divides the waters above from those below with a firmament that he calls “sky.”¹¹ Genesis 1:2 says that darkness was on the face of the waters, referred to as “the deep,” or *tehom* in Hebrew. *Tehom*, which has a similar word stem as Tiamat, is used in other books of the Bible to describe a rebellious ocean similar to Tiamat, whom Yahweh battles.¹² Because of the similarity of the accounts of dividing the waters, of the battles against the rebellious *tehom* in Hebrew literature and the battle against Tiamat, and of the sounds of the words *tehom* and Tiamat, it is most likely that Genesis 1 references the *Enuma Elish*. This reference delineates a contrast between Genesis and the Babylonian stories: Genesis 1 presents the dividing of the waters as simple, happening without struggle.

Instead, Genesis 1 emphasizes the struggle of finding the right relationship between different things God creates. At the end of the second day, after God creates a firmament to divide the waters, the text concludes that the day has finished without mentioning that God saw what he made on that day as good. In the first act of creation in Genesis 1, the creation of light on day one, God creates light and sees that it is good. At the end of creation, the created order in its entirety is seen by God as very good; God sees every act of creation as good on the same day.

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⁹ Cassuto, vol. 1, 32.
¹¹ Genesis 1:8, trans. Sacks, 6.
he performs the action, except during the creation of humans on day six and the arrangement of waters on the second day. What makes the second day exceptional?

This question is partially answered by the rule of seven mentioned previously. Genesis 1:6-10, which describes the second and third days of creation, mention the word “water” seven times in order to emphasize that God’s arrangement of the waters is the subject of these verses and that the arrangement of the waters is complete. After the second day is finished, the text has only used the word for “water” five times, indicating that the arrangement of the waters has not been finished. On the third day of creation, in verses 9-10, God gathers the waters together and names them “Seas.” When the waters are gathered, the dry land appears and God calls it “Land.” After the seventh use of the word “water,” God sees the arrangement as good. Until the firmament properly distinguished the waters above from those below, and until God distinguished the dry land from the gathered waters, the arrangement was not complete and could not be seen as good. After the waters are set in their proper space and relation to land, God sees the whole arrangement as good. This word “good,” tov in Hebrew, may mean that something is suitable or satisfactory; in Genesis 49:15 a suitable place for Jacob is called good, and the Israelites call a luxurious life in Egypt good in Numbers 11:8. In Genesis 1, “good” connotes complete, including having a right relationship to other things. Until the waters were completely distinguished from the land they border and were distinguished through formal names, they were not complete, and God could not observe the intrinsic goodness made apparent by its order.  

The process of creating a good world, according to Genesis 1, is not defeating the monsters like Tiamt that threaten peace and order, but finding a suitable order where creation may be seen as

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good. Ultimately, this problem reaches its climax when God creates humans but does not see them as good.

During the fifth and sixth days, God makes and orders the creatures who inhabit the land, sky, and seas God brought into order on the second and third days. On the fifth day, God creates the living things of the sky and the seas; he then blesses the fish that they be fruitful and multiply. These verses contain the first instance when God bestows this blessing; humans receive the blessing on the sixth day of creation, and Noah’s family receives this same blessing after the flood is over. Therefore, God’s blessing to the fish and fowl illustrates what kind of blessing God gives to humanity. God says “Let the waters swarm with swarming things… and let flying creatures fly.”\textsuperscript{14} The Hebrew stem for the “swarm” means “movement,” and the idea of the verse is that fish swarm in all directions without limitations.\textsuperscript{15} The flying creatures, likewise, are to fly about “hither and thither, in all directions,” as implied by the intensive verb form for “fly about”.\textsuperscript{16} God blesses the fish that they be fruitful and multiply, and blesses the fowl that they multiply. The blessing God gives the fish and fowl assures their open destiny to procreate abundantly and make their home in every direction of their respective domains.

The creation on the fifth day includes a peculiar irregularity that may be crucial to the meaning of the chapter. Starting with the creation of the sky on the second day, all acts of creation include the phrase “and it was so.” For example, in Genesis 1:7, “God made the expanse and it divided the water which was under the expanse from the water which was over the expanse: and it was so.”\textsuperscript{17} The fish and fowl, along with light and mankind, are not said to be “so,” and instead receive a blessing that no creatures up until this point have received.

\textsuperscript{14} Cassuto, \textit{A Commentary on the Book of Genesis}, vol. 1, 47.
\textsuperscript{15} Cassuto, vol. 1, 48.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Trans. Sacks, 6.
Immediately afterwards, the animals are made without a blessing addressed to them, and the text says “and it was so.” After day one, no creatures said to be “so” receive a blessing, and no creatures who receive a blessing are said to be “so.” This indicates a connection between being blessed and not being “so.” This phrase, “and it was so,” also has a particular meaning that applies to all creatures except the fish, fowl, light, and man.

Genesis 1 does not use the word “so” according to a rigid pattern. In verses 9, 11, 15, 24, and 30, the phrase is used after God declares what shall be made but before the plan is executed and God interacts with the creation itself. For example, in verse 11, God says, “Let the earth grass grass,” it was “so,” and then the earth sends forth grass. Verse seven breaks this pattern: God commands a firmament to be, he makes it, it is “so,” and then God names the firmament. This word “so,” *ken* in Hebrew, has a root that signifies “firm,” as in “established.” When used elsewhere with the Hebrew “to be” verb, it seems to mean “to be in a particular, set way,” as in Exodus 10 when locusts overcome the land, and such a state had never been “so” before. In Genesis 1, to be “so” cannot mean that an act of creation happened in the particular way God wanted it to because the light, fish, fowl, and man all happen as God demands. What then is the principle that distinguishes between the creatures that are “so” from those that are not?

Robert Sacks gives the most fitting interpretation of this phrase: a creature that is “so” has “a definite path in which to be.” The living creatures who are not said to be “so” possess an openness in their direction; because their way was is open, God gives them special direction and assurance by blessing them to flourish without restraint. An explanation of “so” as a definite direction to follow answers the question of how a thing is established as “so” before the coming

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18 Cassuto, vol. 1, 54
19 However, in verses 9 and 30 it is ambiguous or irrelevant as to whether it was “so” before it was created or after.
20 Trans. Sacks, 7.
21 Cassuto, vol. 1, 34.
22 Sacks, 8.
to be of the created thing, such as in verses 11, 15, and 24. It also explains why blessed creatures are not “so.” Because the fish, fowl, and man have all have been afforded a great openness of direction, they require a blessing to point them towards a fruitful destiny as they find their own way. As for the light, which is neither blessed nor called “so,” it may be exactly as God intends without any arranging or molding of preexistent material, as the other acts of creation require. Light does not need a definite way to be because it can simply be as God directs.

On the sixth day, God clearly distinguishes the humans from the animals in six ways. First, God does not nominally mention man as an animal. The fish, fowl, and land animals are referred to as “livings things,” hachiyah, a word used seven times during the fifth and sixth days. Genesis 1 does not use this word to denote humans. Second, God makes man “in [his] own image.” This phrase is mysterious, but has some concurrent usage in similar literature. In some ancient Near Eastern texts, the phrase is used to make a distinction between the human monarchs, whose right to rule was justified by their likeness to the gods, and their subjects. The phrase is also used of visual symbols that signify a particular Mesopotamian god. Perhaps the phrase “image of God” suggests that humans have an exclusive political connection to the God who rules over all creation. Third, man is not said to be “so,” as the other land animals are said to be. Also, humans receive a blessing to be fruitful and multiply, a blessing not extended to the land animals. Moreover, the fowl, who make their nests on the land, are blessed to multiply but not to be fruitful, while God blesses the fish in the sea to be fruitful and multiply: because the animals are not blessed, and the birds are not blessed to be fruitful, it seems that only man is to reproduce abundantly on the land. Fourth, Genesis emphatically uses the word bara, “create,”

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23 Sacks, 13.
25 Sarna, The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis, 12.
26 Ibid.
three times to describe the creation of man. The word “create,” which sometimes connotes a
wondrous event in addition to denoting the making of something,\textsuperscript{27} is only used in Genesis 1 to
mark off important epochs: the creation of all in Genesis 1:1, the creation of the first “living
things” in verse 21, and the creation of the first humans.\textsuperscript{28} Fifth, when God creates the fish, fowl,
and land animals, he sees them as good. God never makes this observation of humans. In
Genesis 2, which gives greater attention to the creation of humankind, God’s first comment
about man is that he is alone, and this is not good. Once humans are created as male and female,
God still does not see humans as good; eventually, in Genesis 6, God sees mankind as evil and
wipes them out. Genesis portrays humans as ambiguous; their way is open and not fixed in an
order that is decidedly good. Lastly, God distinguishes humans from the animals by blessing
humans that they subdue the land and have dominion over the other animals.

Such a distinction between humans and animals was common in Near Eastern literature.
Among some of the peoples of the ancient Near East, it was obvious that men, or at least some
men, were far above the animals. In the \textit{Epic of Gilgamesh}, the harlot tells Enkidu that he has
become like a god after abandoning his animal friends and associating with men through having
sex with a prostitute.\textsuperscript{29} Enkidu then joins with Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk. Though humans like
Gilgamesh exercise rule in Babylonian stories, the \textit{Enuma Elish} does not present humans as
rulers in the likeness of divine beings. The luminaries, not humans, were made in the likeness of
the divine, and man is to be a servile savage made with the purpose to give the gods a life of

\textsuperscript{27} For some examples, see Exodus 34:10, Numbers 16:30, and Isaiah 4:5.
\textsuperscript{28} John H. Sailhamer, \textit{The Pentateuch as Narrative: a Biblical-Theological Commentary} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan
Publishing House, 1992), 93.
\textsuperscript{29} See lines 21-35, tablet iv, in “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” tran. Spieser, in \textit{The Ancient Near East: an Anthology of
Texts and Pictures}, ed. James B. Pritchard, 44.
ease. In Genesis, man’s rule is under the blessing and will of God, who made man in his own image with certain privileges and responsibilities to relate to other men and the other creatures as God desires. Human rule over others, humans and nonhumans alike, is virtually universal in human societies; but in Genesis man’s dominion is under God’s domain.

In verse 26, God exhorts himself to create mankind and “let them have dominion” over the living things. God spells out this dominion in detail in Genesis 1:28 when he blesses man: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion.” The Hebrew words “subdue” and “have dominion” have a very particular, and important, use in the Torah. Subduing is an activity only performed upon the land one may inhabit personally. The Hebrew word for “the earth” in verse 28 is the same word used for those who serve the land by farming and of the land promised to Abraham and the Israelites who enter the land of Canaan. In Numbers and Joshua, the word “subdue” is used to refer to the Israelite occupation and ownership of the Promised Land. The occupation of the Promised Land provides the Israelite with a definite place to call home. God grants this occupation under the condition that Israel obeys the laws God gives them, particularly the laws pertaining to granting the land, its people, and its animals the Sabbath and Jubilee years as stipulated in Leviticus 25-26. According to these two chapters, if the laws are not upheld, the Israelite will be devastated and exiled into foreign territory, and the land will enjoy its denied sabbatical rest.

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31 Cassuto, vol. 1, 56.
32 Cassuto, vol. 1, 53.
33 The word Cassuto translates as “the earth,” ha’aretz, also means “the land.”
34 Numbers 32:22, 32:29, and Joshua 18:1.
As for God’s blessing to “have dominion,” this term in the Hebrew Bible implies a formal rule. If Israelites disobey God, their foes will have dominion over them.\textsuperscript{35} No Israelite may have a harsh dominion over any Israelite laborer or slave.\textsuperscript{36} Balaam’s fourth oracle foretells of a king who will hold formal rule, or dominion, over the nation. 1 Kings 4:24 says of Solomon that he had dominion over the surrounding kingdoms and their kings. Whereas subduing implies making a home on the land, having dominion implies the subjection of other autonomous living things in a formal order.

For Israel, subduing means making a human home on the land, and having dominion means being free from the subordination of other nations and having other nations subordinated to their authority. Read together in Genesis 1:28, to have dominion and subdue the land means that humans may make a home and habitation on the land with a formal order that is not threatened by animal subjects and activities. The imperatives in Genesis 1:28—be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue the earth, and have dominion—do not function as commands when used in a blessing.\textsuperscript{37} Rather, the blessing uses an imperative to emphasize the provision which will allow the blessed to flourish, such as the fish’s blessing to move and reproduce abundantly in the sea without limitations. This is why animals on the dry land are not blessed to be fruitful and multiply, and the birds who make their nests on the land are not blessed to multiply. God assures mankind that they may freely make their home on the land in a way that is exclusive to humans. God’s assurance of human flourishing without a threat from the animals is not isolated to Genesis 1; God gives a similar assurance when he blesses these new founders of

\textsuperscript{35} Leviticus 26:17  
\textsuperscript{36} Leviticus 25:53  
\textsuperscript{37} For example, in Genesis 27, verses 19 and 29, Jacob gives imperatives in the jussive form that do not act as commands. See Sailhamer, The Pentateuch as Narrative: a Biblical-Theological Commentary, 96.
mankind who exit the ark: the fear and dread of them shall be on the animals. The same phrase, “fear and dread,” is used when God assures Israel that the stronger and more numinous inhabitants of Canaan will not be a threat to the Israelites and their eventual occupation of Canaan, for the fear and dread of the Israelites will be upon them. In Genesis 1:28, God encourages humans to make their home upon the land; as for the other inhabitants of the land, the animals, humans should not worry about them.

Although the blessing to have dominion, read in isolation, seems to leave room for human despotism over creation, the diets God establishes for humans and animals reveal that God originally intended for humans and animals to live in harmony. As with Israel, subduing the land and having dominion come with directions and limitations from God. God’s first, and only, direction to his creatures in the creation account is the gift of distinct foods for humans and the other living things. God gives humans the fruit from seed-bearing trees to eat; this food source is sustainable in that it is perpetually renewing itself according to its distinct kind. God gives the animals different plants, green herbs, to eat. The diets of humans and the animals do not require any competition or violence because man and the living things eat separate kinds of self-perpetuating vegetation from the bountiful land. Humans need not fear that the abundance of animals will eat their food, but they also need not kill an animal for meat or drive them away from scarce resources; if the animals are not to be a threat or competition for inhabiting the good land, the humans are not to be a threat to the animals. In the original order, creatures are not to eat the living things which God has made and seen as good. After God reveals these diets to his creatures, he establishes them as being “so” in verse 30.

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38 Genesis 9:2
Genesis 1 culminates in the creation of humans, depicting them in contrast to animals because their future direction is open and ambiguous, and because they are made in the image of God and have a dominion over other creatures. This order includes a harmonious relationship between humans and animals as signified by their vegetable diets. After the account of creation in Genesis 1-2:4, the story of the Garden of Eden completes the account of man’s creation. This literary form, describing an event in past perfect and later resuming the narrative of that event, occurs elsewhere in Genesis. The Garden of Eden story, then, may be read as a continuation of the creation of humans described in Genesis 1. In the Garden of Eden, God addresses man’s ambiguity by splitting up the human into two companions, male and female, and placing them in a lush garden he built for them. His only command for the humans in their life in Eden is that they shall not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad. In Genesis 3:6, man eats from this tree, God sends humans out from Eden, humans develop civilization, and human civilization becomes so wicked and violent that God wipes it out with a flood. After the flood, God sanctions meat-eating when he establishes civil law. In order to understand why humans require this civil law, and the permission to eat meat that it contains, the reader of Genesis needs to understand how, and why, humans fail to live in a way that God will tolerate. The human shortcomings which provoke God to wipe out humanity and start again with civil law, and meat-eating, begin in the story of the Garden of Eden.

The story of Eden retells the creation of the man and the woman, but in much more humble terms than Genesis 1. Instead of focusing on humankind’s status as an image of the

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40. For example: in Genesis 28, Jacob goes to Laban in verse 5 and Esau responds to Isaac in verses 6-9; in verse 10, the story of Jacob travelling to Laban begins after the text described the journey as completed in verse 5. See Cassuto, vol.1, 99.

41. Because the woman does not receive the name Chava, or Eve, until after the humans are cursed to leave Eden, I will refer to her as “the woman” in all comments pertaining to the story of the Garden of Eden. As for man, the word used to describe the man created in Genesis 1 and 2 is adam, which includes both male and female when it
divine, Genesis 2 states that God forms man from the ground as a groundling: God makes a man, *adam*, who comes from the dust of the ground, *ha'adamah*. Genesis 2:5 states that no grain of the field had arose because there was not yet a man to work the ground. If man had remained on the ground and not been placed in Eden, he would have worked the ground and died eventually, since he would not have had access to the Tree of Life in Eden which, according to Genesis 3:22, allows humans to live forever. In Eden, God provides for man a life where labor and death are unnecessary. Eden, according to Umberto Cassuto’s explanation of Eden’s etymology, means: “a place that is well watered throughout.” The Garden of Eden is a place where rain and the tenuous dependence upon rain in agriculture are unnecessary because of its prominent rivers. If humans can live in Eden, they may escape the troubles of death and labor associated with the ground from which they were made.

Whereas Genesis 1 emphasized the distinction between man and the animals, Genesis 2 emphasizes his kinship with the animals. After God makes man, he addresses man’s ambiguity, first suggested by Genesis 1, when he notes in Genesis 2:18 that it is not good for man to be alone. His solution is that he shall find a “helper corresponding to him.” God first brings the animals to the man, waiting to see if the man meets his mate among his fellow creatures of the land: none is found. In order to understand why the man leaves the company of animals and why God decides to split humans into two genders, the reader needs to understand the Hebrew phrase *ezer k’negdo*, which Cassuto has translated as a “helper corresponding to him [man].”

does not refer to the proper name Adam. For example, Genesis 5:2 states that God created man as male and female and named them, collectively, *adam.*

Sacks, 21.


The words for male and female are not used until the man sees the woman for the first time in Genesis 2:23.

Cassuto, vol 1., 126.
The word “helper,” is a somewhat misleading translation. In the 19 times that ezer appears outside of Genesis 2, it is used 16 times to refer to God’s role as a savior and defender in battle or a time of trouble.\textsuperscript{46} Also, Isaiah 30:5 speaks of princes who are not an ezer insofar as they cannot protect one from shame and humiliation. The word “helper,” in these verses, would be appropriate only if understood as one who can be depended upon for salvation from disastrous circumstances; in many cases, the words “savior,” “sustainer,” or “rescuer” are more appropriate translations. Man is split into two genders, and the male will depend upon the female for his life and wellbeing. As for the word k’negdo, it literally means “in front of” or “vis-a-vis,” but can also refer to one who is in front of another as an opponent.\textsuperscript{47} Man needs a helper outside of himself, opposed through their differences yet matching in kind: a counterpart.\textsuperscript{48} This counterpart, in order to be the type of sustainer and savior that the word ezer connotes, must be different enough to intervene on man’s behalf but similar enough to truly relate vis-à-vis; this vis-à-vis relation is what man could not find among his fellow creatures of the land. In Eden, the isolated human is not in any immediate danger that would require the intervention of an ezer. What is not good about his isolation, then, is his own independence and autonomy. The man needs to depend on someone outside of himself: a sustainer corresponding to him.

Just as the world in Genesis 1 did not exist as a “simple unity,”\textsuperscript{49} but existed in parts—land, sky, and seas—that needed to be brought into right relation with one another, God created humankind as distinct, relating parts. After God has addressed man’s unideal solitude, humanity encounters a problem: how will the distinct parts of humankind relate in a way that is good? This is similar to the problem of finding the right arrangement for water in Genesis 1. When the man

\textsuperscript{46} Exodus 18:4, and Deuteronomy 33.
\textsuperscript{47} See Sacks, 24.
first sees his counterpart, he describes her in terms of his kind: she is bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh. Though the man understands his special sexual relationship to the female, neither the man nor the woman demonstrate the life-giving relationship implicit in the term ezer k’negdo in the following chapters. In the story of the Garden of Eden, and the following story of Cain and Abel, humans do not find a good way to relate to one another. Their relationships become so disastrously violent, God decides to blot out all humans but Noah’s family, whom he charges with a civil law that will define their bonds to one another. While they are in Eden, the man and the woman live in innocence, with great freedom that does not include the rule of law. To understand why the civil law is necessary, the reader of Genesis must understand why humans could not live innocently in Eden.

Once the man and the woman are in Eden, God’s only direction to them concerns what they should and should not eat. They may eat of any tree in the garden, with the exception of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad. This knowledge that they are not to obtain from the tree is the awareness of things good and bad, rather than the discernment of good from evil, as is often thought. Rather, after the woman eats from the tree she is aware of the fact of her nakedness, but confused as to what to make of this fact. The Hebrew Bible uses phrases different from “knowledge of good and bad” to denote the judgment of what is good and bad, as in 2 Samuel 19:35: “Can I discern what is good and what is not?” The reader should remember how Genesis 1 used the Hebrew word “good,” and should note that the word for “bad” may also denote what is harmful in addition to what is morally reprehensible (e.g. Deut. 32:23). To be ignorant of good and bad is to be ignorant in innocence. As a case in point, children who do not know good and bad in Deuteronomy 1:39 are exempt from the judgment of the adult Israelites

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50 Genesis 2:23.
51 See Cassuto, vol. 1, 112.
52 Ibid. Also see Isaiah 7:15-16 for another example.
who left Egypt. However, once the children are grown and no longer ignorant, God calls them to choose between good and bad in Deuteronomy 30:15. The knowledge of good and bad is knowledge of the world in all its ambiguity and in the urgency to judge things as good or bad. In Eden, God will require that the man and the woman are as children in their innocence.

The answer as to why God requires humans to be innocent like children in Eden is revealed in the story’s juxtaposition of human nakedness and the serpent’s cunning. In Eden, the man and the woman were both naked “and were not ashamed.” Biblical Hebrew has different words to described nakedness. One word, ervath, denotes the shameful uncovering of one’s sexual parts; for example, Leviticus 18 proscribes Israelites from uncovering different familial members to see this kind of nakedness. The word used in Genesis 2-3, arummim, does not have sexual connotations; it connotes vulnerability, particularly as a creature before God. In Job 1:21 and Ecclesiastes 5:15, the word is used to describe the way newborns or the deceased are totally bare and vulnerable before the God who brings both life and death. This definition fits with the way the man and the woman respond after they know they are naked: they build girdles, or “warrior belts,” for themselves.

The word arum, “cunning,” plays on the word for naked, arummim, and denotes a perversity of the vulnerability and innocence of man’s nakedness in Eden. To be cunning is to be misleading and superficial. In Job, arum is used twice: once in Job 5:12 to describe a man with his own plans that a just God will surely foil, and again in Job 15:5 to describe one who thinks they have wisdom but is actually impious. In Proverbs, the word is used favorably of a prudent man who keeps his knowledge to himself in Proverbs 12:23. For Proverbs, this self-protection may be prudence, but only for the wise man in the company of fools. While the naked man is

54 Combs and Post. The girdles the man and the woman build are “normally made of metal and used as protection in battle” according to Sacks, 31. See 2 Samuel 18:11, 1 Kings 2:5, and 2 Kings 3:21.
vulnerable, the cunning one is not what they seem to be: their way is not open or vulnerable to others. To the poor in Job, the cunning one is a threat; to the woman in Genesis, the cunning serpent will give misinformation and encourage her to distrust God and become aware of her own misguided ambitions.

The conversation between the woman and the serpent in Genesis 3 illustrates both the serpent’s cunning and the woman’s innocence and ignorance. The serpent is cunning in that it attempts to make the woman forget God’s commandment by arousing her curiosity and her desire for divine knowledge. First, he asks the woman if God commanded her to not eat from tree. This provokes the woman to respond that they may eat from all trees, but there is a special exception. The serpent then tells the woman that God, who commanded her not to eat from this exceptional tree, knows that when she eats its fruit, she “will be like Elohim, knowing good and evil.” The serpent points out to the woman that God has demonstrated a special knowledge by commanding them not to not eat of a tree that God knows will bestow the same divine knowledge if she eats of the tree’s fruit. By indicating that God has a knowledge that the woman does not, the serpent arouses the woman’s desire for knowledge; she responds by giving heed to this exceptional tree of which the serpent has provoked her curiosity. It is fitting that it is a serpent who has provoked and manipulated her desire for knowledge, because the Hebrew word nachash, “serpent,” is almost identical to the word for “diviner.” Like a diviner, the serpent demonstrates knowledge beyond the ordinary, but in a superficial, cunning way.

Giving heed to the tree activates the woman’s desire and imagination. The woman sees that the tree is good, as God saw that something was good in Genesis 1. She also notices that the tree is desirable to make one wise. Elsewhere in the Bible, having wisdom is compared to doing

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55 Genesis 3:5, trans. Cassuto. The word Elohim can mean the God of Israel, or it can mean gods or divine beings. See Cassuto, vol. 1, 138.
56 Combs and Post, 156.
good;\(^{57}\) it seems that the woman now imagines that this beautiful tree will help her not only
know about things that are good and bad, but also discern what is good. She does not truly see
what is good, for the tree’s fruit will bring her pain and harm. She sees with her desires and her
false understanding which the serpent provoked in her.

The woman, in her conversation with the serpent, demonstrates her own innocence
implicit in both her lack of the knowledge of good and bad and in the statement that she was
naked but not ashamed. When the serpent first asks her a question about the trees of the garden,
the woman responds by framing the matter in terms of what she thinks God has commanded. She
is innocent and obedient, but mistaken on three points.\(^{58}\) First, she says God commanded them
not to touch the tree in the midst of the garden; Genesis 2:9 states that both the Tree of Life and
the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad are in the midst of the garden. The woman is
confused as to which is the Tree of Life, which bears fruit that allows humans to eat forever, and
the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad, of which God had said that if they eat of this tree
they will surely die. This is reminiscent of Deuteronomy 30:15, when the Israelites are called to
choose between life and death by being either obedient or disobedient. The woman does not
seem to be aware that a similar choice between life and death is before her. Second, she says that
God told them they shall not touch the tree “lest ye die,”\(^{59}\) but God actually said that if they
touch the tree they shall “surely die.”\(^{60}\) Finally, she says that God commanded them not to
touch—that is, handle—the tree.\(^{61}\) God actually commanded them not to eat from the tree. The

\(^{57}\) See Psalm 36:3.
\(^{58}\) Sacks observes these three points on 28.
\(^{60}\) Genesis 2:17, trans. Sacks, 22.
\(^{61}\) The word “touch,” nagha, means to handle in a significant way, such as in Genesis 26:11: “Whoever touches this
man or his wife shall be put to death.” See Cassuto, 145.
woman does not understand why eating of this tree, rather than merely handling, is what God has forbidden.

What, then, is so special about eating? In Genesis, eating binds people together in a way that can be appropriate or inappropriate. For example, Abraham’s servant would not eat Laban’s offering of food until the arrangement for Isaac’s wedding had been made; after the arrangement is complete, Abraham’s servant may sit down and enjoy a meal with Laban. Laban will also sit down with Jacob and eat at the stone that marks the covenant they have made to end their conflict. Another such symbolic event occurs when Joseph’s brothers, who had once sold him away out of jealousy, enjoy a meal with Benjamin, who has been given five times as much food as each other brother had. The brothers came to accept the inequality of possessions and favor among brothers that had earlier provoked them to jealousy and betrayal. Their acceptance of Benjamin’s favor is symbolized in the merry meal they agree to have with him. However, some situations cannot be accepted, such as when Abraham denies the gifts of the king of Sodom, which included food, because he did not want to be in the debt or partnership with the plundering king. Thus, to be wise with food is to be wise with one’s company and the social arrangements one makes. The woman, who engages with the cunning serpent and later, in 3:6, leads her husband to eat of this deadly fruit, does not possess this wisdom of when to eat and with whom.

The second significance of food is the control of desire. When God gives the Israelites the law on Sinai, he demands that man shall not desire certain things. Food is the one of the most evident of human desires, and part of its importance is that food may be obtained in so

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62 Sacks, 377.
63 See Genesis 31:44-45.
64 Genesis 43:34.
66 The word for “desirable” that is used to describe the tree that is desirable for making one wise shares the same Hebrew stem, *chamad*, as the command to not covet, or desire, another man’s possessions in Exodus 20:17.
many ways; some of the ways are good, and others bad. For this reason, food is one of the
primary arenas of desire where good judgment must be used. In Genesis 1, God establishes what
the creatures may each eat so that they may not take life from another creature. The woman has
not yet understood or practiced the discernment of what is good to eat and which desires should
be given heed.

Aristotle's lesson on temperance in *Nicomachean Ethics* elucidates why the woman fails
to obey God's command. Aristotle contrasts the virtue of temperance with the vice of self-
indulgence, which is delighting in what is "hateful" or in anything to a degree that is "more than
one ought and than most men do." A self-indulgent person desires anything that is pleasing, or
at least most pleasing, and is led by his appetite "to choose pleasure at the expense of all else." Such people indiscriminately desire what is beyond what is good or healthy for them, and these desires rule them. Aristotle compares the self-indulgent to unchastened children who "live at the beck and call of appetite." To avoid the excess that comes from following desires indiscriminately, desires must come into harmony with the rational principle as unchastened children come under the direction of their tutor. All desires, especially those peculiar to a person and any situations of theirs, must be under the direction of some principle that oversees all desires as they occur and prevents them from being pursued in excess. When the desire for pleasure reconciles with this principle, the temperate person may desire as he or she should according to the principle's direction. According to Aristotle, the one who follows their appetites will be led to unhealthy excess, while those who learn to practice temperance subject all desires to a guiding principle.

68 Ibid., 119a2-3 (trans. Ross.)
69 Ibid., III.12, 119b5-6 (trans. Ross).
With this discussion of Aristotle’s lesson about temperance in mind, we can more fully understand why the humans could not live in Eden according to God’s conditions. In Eden, the man and woman enjoyed freedom and ease. While they had one commandment to obey, their life did not include a total subjugation of their desires to anything higher; it was a life without instruction or directions with the exception of eating from one tree. Without this understanding and virtuous character, humans are like the self-indulgent person that Aristotle likens to an unchastened child. According to God’s stipulations, life in Eden was only possible if humans could be both innocent, like a child, and obedient. God took humans from the ground and placed them in a garden he had built himself, making both death and labor unnecessary. But the humans do not stay innocent and obedient once they desire what is beyond the life God made for them. Just as God took them from the ground, humans take the fruit they desire, thus rejecting God’s conditions for the life he placed before them. Once the humans eat of the tree and obtain an awareness of things as good and bad, God will not let them live in Eden without death any longer: the “experiment of the Garden has failed.”\(^71\)

God responds by making them leave Eden and allowing them to suffer in the outside world without the provisions they enjoyed in Eden. First, God returns them to the ground, where they will labor in agriculture and childbearing. God made a home for humans which they rejected; God responds by allowing them to painfully make their own civilization, characterized by agriculture. This is exemplified in man’s change of food; whereas in the garden he ate the fruit that grew on the surrounding trees, upon the ground he will sweat to eat human-made bread, “*the distinctly human food.*”\(^72\) The result, then, of human disobedience is human autonomy and,

\(^{71}\) Sacks interprets the story of the Garden of Eden as God’s attempt to see if man could live without the knowledge of good and bad. Once they eat, this experiment has failed. See *A Commentary of the Book of Genesis*, 36.

ultimately, civilization. Outside the fruitful and well-watered Garden of Eden, humans will need to engage in the toilsome work of intensive agriculture, characterized by the making of bread; humans will also begin to suffer human hegemony, characterized by political strife between men and women God curses humans to endure in Genesis 3:16. Second, God forces them to leave Eden, where they may eat from the Tree of Life and life forever. Death will constantly remind humans of their origins as God’s creatures taken from the dust of the ground; in this way, it is partially a substitute for the life of nakedness humans lived in Eden.

After God curses humans, he assures them that his intentions are not hostile when he clothes them in skins. Humans, after they were aware that they were naked, made for themselves girdles, or warrior belts, out of fig leaves. God replaces their paltry armor with a more permanent, and less defensive, covering: coverings of skins. God removes their defenses, and gives them the coverings they desire, but ones that are more like the humans’ original nakedness before God. In his curses, God presents the world outside Eden as harsh, but he is also willing to accommodate their fears and aid them as they begin human civilization. After clothing them, God sends them forth to begin again; in this segment of the narrative, God’s approach to humans is largely hands-off. God will not impose any additional commands; the command given to humans in Eden are no longer relevant, and their only direction is the established plant-based diet in Genesis 1 and the curses in Genesis 3.

In the following chapters, this hands-off approach will fail to prevent human rebellion from becoming worse. Between the end of Genesis 3, in which God still has not yet imposed law, and the establishment of law in Genesis 9, man becomes exceedingly wicked and violent, starting with Cain in Genesis 4, and God responds by wiping humans out and beginning again with Noah’s family and the animals they take on the ark. God also responds by establishing the
law, including a provision to sanction meat-eating. I will explain how the proceeding narrative anticipates the law God later establishes and demonstrates why this law, along with the sanction for meat-eating, is necessary.

In Genesis 4, human violence against humans begins with the brothers Cain and Abel. The name Abel, in Hebrew, means “breath” and is used to express the brevity of a human’s life in the Psalms and Job.\textsuperscript{73} The book of Ecclesiastes also uses this word to describe the futility or vanity of human life.\textsuperscript{74} Abel represents the status of man as a mortal creature God reminded the humans of when he sent forth humanity back to the ground from which they were created. Cain’s name comes from a stem which generally means “to form” or “a formed thing.” As a noun, the Bible uses this stem only one time, in 2 Samuel 21:16, to signify a formed weapon. Cain takes up the sophisticated art of agriculture, and according to verses 17-22 he becomes the father of the first artisans and city-builders. While Abel’s name, and unfortunate death, symbolize the brevity of human life, Cain embodies human art: crafts that manipulate the world to suit the purposes of humans. His descendants initiate and found many of the common trappings of civilization: cities, music, the domestication of cattle, and metalworking.\textsuperscript{75}

Human art poses a challenge to the limitations of mortality God imposed upon man in Genesis 3. Mere human life may be a futile breath, but what man forms and establishes may outlive his short lifespan. Because what is established, such a city or a farm, can impact a community or family over generations, more careful thought must be given to what is established and formed. For Gilgamesh, art is the only way he finds he may conquer death; after failing to

\textsuperscript{73} Cassuto, vol. 1, 202. See Psalm 144:4 and Job 7:16.
\textsuperscript{74} Sacks, 38.
\textsuperscript{75} See Genesis 4:20-22.
achieve the immortality that Utnapishtim was granted by the gods, Gilgamesh realizes that his immortality was found in the city of Uruk that he had built for himself.76

The challenge that human art and civilization presents is evident in Genesis 4 when Cain and Abel bring sacrifices to God. God gives regard to Abel’s sacrifice, but not to Cain’s, which causes Cain’s face to fall in discouragement. Although Cain’s sacrifice is not as extravagant as Abel’s sacrifice of the “firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions,”77 God has not yet demanded any type of sacrifice nor stipulated what sacrifices are not acceptable. Why, then, would God accept one sacrifice and not the other? After Cain becomes discouraged at God’s pending acceptance, God presents Cain with a choice in verses 6-7: if he does well, there will be a lifting of his head instead of his fallen countenance. If he does not do well, sin will be waiting to master him. If God had instructed Cain in what sacrifice he should have brought, it would indicate that God was displeased with Cain’s inferior sacrifice. Since God does not mention sacrifices in his reply, this suggests that there is possibly another explanation as to why God does not easily accept his sacrifice.

The difference between Cain and Abel which provokes an incommensurate response from God to their sacrifices is in their distinct occupations. Cain serves the ground as a farmer, while Abel is a keeper of sheep. A life of shepherding is simple and fits the transitory connotations of Abel’s name: to keep sheep is to keep what may be easily exchanged and moved, and to live as keeper of sheep is to live a life that can easily be exchanged for a different kind of life. For example, other famous keepers of sheep in the Bible, such as David and Moses, are easily able to exchange their life as a shepherd for a new calling.

76 Sacks, 74.
77 Cassuto, vol. 1, 204.
A life upon the land, in contrast, is a much more permanent affair, especially in the life prescribed by the Mosaic Law. In Leviticus 25:13-28, the Torah prescribes a Jubilee year that will return to an Israelite family any ancestral land that they have lost or sold; the land will, in time, always return to the same family and thus stay in the family line forever. This form of justice, the permanent family share of the land, appears in Genesis in chapter 38. In Genesis 38, Judah will not let Tamar marry his son, the brother of her deceased husband, to produce for her an heir who, according to the later stipulations for levirate marriage in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, will ensure that she and her family line will have their own share of land. Judah makes her live in her father-in-law’s household, but Tamar craftily produces a male heir through Judah, and Judah discovers that she is in the right and his actions were wrong. This illustrates how, in Israelite law, the cultivation of the land, and who cultivated it, was central to their system of justice; farming the land was an affair extending down every generation, far beyond the brief life of one mortal person. Because the cultivation of the land and the culture that arises from it—such as the arts and cattle-raising—Cain’s descendants inaugurate—may be more permanent than a man’s life, the life of a farmer merits more serious consideration than the life of a keeper of sheep, which is more simple and thus more simply accepted. As for Cain, God waits to see what he will do.

When Cain murders Abel, God responds by trying to prevent further murder while also hesitating to impose any sort of law, particularly the capital punishment which God soon institutes in Genesis 9. God curses Cain away from the ground he farms to live a life of wandering. God has waited to see what Cain has established, and it is now unacceptable. However, God, the creator of life, does not wish for blood to be spilled in vengeance. After Cain complains in verse 14 that everyone else—that is, the family of Abel, whom he murdered—will

78 Genesis 4:11-12
desire to kill him in vengeance, God, in response, gives Cain a sign that will prevent others from murdering him and reassure Cain that God protects him.\textsuperscript{79}

God’s measure to protect Cain corresponds to the Torah’s prescriptions for cities of refuge in Numbers 35:6-34. This passage states that bloodshed pollutes the land where the Israelites, and God himself, dwells. Both these texts illustrate God’s value of human life, and his hesitancy to allow human blood to be shed. The purpose of the cities of refuge, as well as Cain’s sign, is that a person shall not be put to death for murder unless the community’s assembly convicts them on the testimony of witnesses. Vengeance may become an endless circuit of bloodshed unless regulated by the standard and judgment of the community. In Numbers 35, God institutes capital punishment for Israel as a response to those convicted by the community of murder; there is no atonement for this crime.\textsuperscript{80} Here in Genesis 4, God attempts to prevent the need for capital punishment by cursing Cain and providing him protection from vengeance. So far in the text, God has not authorized any shedding of blood for meat-eating or human justice. God is hesitant to institute capital punishment. The question this text presents is whether humans can be good, or at least tolerable, while also refraining from killing humans and eating meat.

The human violence God tried to curtail only becomes more considerable and problematic. In Genesis 4:23, Cain’s descendant Lamech kills a young man, boasting that with a mere wound and bruise, he has slain another.\textsuperscript{81} Lamech responds that if Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, a complete measure, then Lamech shall be avenged seventy-sevenfold, which is “in overflowing measure, more than is due.”\textsuperscript{82} Whereas God originally promised to Cain that he would personally bring judgment in equal measure on those who murder Cain, Lamech

\textsuperscript{79} See Cassuto, vol. 1, 227.
\textsuperscript{80} Numbers 35:33.
\textsuperscript{81} This is Cassuto’s exegesis of Genesis 4:23 in Cassuto, vol 1., 239.
\textsuperscript{82} Cassuto, vol. 1, 243.
understands vengeance as his personal right to take the life of anyone who offenses him.\footnote{Ibid.} God’s response to human bloodshed has not been understood.

In the line of Seth, Cain’s brother, there is also a descendent named Lamech who does not understand the problem of human injustice. This demonstrates how God’s initial response to human error in Genesis 3, the curses, are an insufficient measure to make humans live in a way that is good or acceptable. In Genesis 5, Lamech has a son named Noah; in verse 29, he says that Noah will bring them comfort from the labor and toil that comes from the ground God cursed. Lamech’s statement is a parody of a statement about God in Genesis 6:6. In Genesis 5:29, Lamech hopes that men would be consoled (\textit{y’nachamenu}) from their work (\textit{ma’asenu}) and toil (\textit{me’its’von}). In Genesis 6:6, regrets (\textit{yinachem}) what he had made (\textit{asah}), and it grieved (\textit{yit’atsev}) him. God and Lamech use the same verbs, in different derivations, in the same order, but with contrasting thoughts. In Genesis 6, God observes that man has become exceedingly wicked, and he is grieved by this moral dilemma. Lamech, in contrast, sees the suffering God cursed man to endure in labor as the problem that needs to be ameliorated. This contrast anticipates the civil law in Genesis 9, which not only imposes justice, but teaches humans about justice.

Up until the flood, God has resisted imposing law on humans, trusting that they may use their freedom to do well, as God charges Cain in Genesis 4:7. The propensity for rebellion which first appears in Eden is addressed through curses, but God does not impose new commandments nor a civil law for human society. In Genesis 6, man’s ambiguity, first suggested when God did not see man as good in Genesis 1, takes a decided turn: God sees that the “wickedness of man is
great” and that “every device\textsuperscript{84} of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.”\textsuperscript{85} Violence and corruption have become so pervasive that God sees man as only capable of evil: the experiment of a human society without law has failed. Now all humans and animals, according to God in Genesis 6:11, have become corrupt. This word “corrupt,” shachath, sometimes denotes spoiled, such as in Jeremiah 18:3-4 which describes a potter’s vessel that has been spoiled, or corrupted, and must be destroyed and reworked into something new. Like the potter in Jeremiah 18, God destroys his first project by blotting out “all flesh”\textsuperscript{86} and begins again with the animals and humans on Noah’s ark.

The ark that houses Noah’s family and the animals represents a new creation. The animals come into the ark as male and female, according to their kinds; the language of creation in Genesis 1 returns in Genesis 6 to describe the ark.\textsuperscript{87} On the ark, the animals and humans eat the same food that God gave to them: plants.\textsuperscript{88} When God blots out humanity and saves the ark, he returns the world to the simple created order before the development of civilization. When the Genesis flood story is contrasted with its Babylonian counterparts, the reader can more clearly see how the flood in Genesis signifies a return to simplicity. The Babylonian stories say that the hero builds a ship to survive the flood; the ark in Genesis may not be steered by humans like a ship, but floats on the water and rests on the land as God wills.\textsuperscript{89} Moreover, God shuts Noah in the ark in Genesis, whereas in the Babylonian stories, the hero shuts the ship’s door himself.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{84} The word for device, yester, is related to the noun yetsirah, which means “formation” or “creation.” This evokes the civilization of the line of Cain, whose named also means “formation” or “creation.” Civilization, starting with Cain and his art, has resulted in a civilization whose inner thoughts are exclusively evil. Cassuto, vol. 1., 303.
\textsuperscript{85} Genesis 6:5, trans. Cassuto, 301.
\textsuperscript{86} Genesis 6:13, trans. Sacks, 55.
\textsuperscript{87} See Genesis 6:19-20.
\textsuperscript{88} Genesis 6:21.
\textsuperscript{89} Cassuto, vol. 2, 22.
\textsuperscript{90} For example, in the Chaldean flood account, a god tells the hero, Sisit, to shut his door because the flood is about to come. See George Smith, “The Chaldean Account of the Deluge,” in The Flood Myth, ed. Alan Dundes (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 37.
Utnapishtim, in *Gilgamesh*, takes silver and gold, as well his craftsmen, with him;\(^91\) Atrahasis, in a different Babylonian version, takes all his chattels.\(^92\) Noah only takes with him the animals and the food they share in common. Civilization, as it developed without law, has been blotted out in the flood, and it will not be preserved on the ark. Henceforth, God will not prevent humans from developing civilization, but he will demand, especially with the Israelites, that it exists under a law that respects God and the sanctity of life which human violence violated.

After the flood is finished, and before God establishes the first covenant, God says that he will never again bring another all-consuming flood nor curse the ground again because “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.”\(^93\) This description carries two implications which are crucial to the story. First, the improvement from God seeing man as exclusively evil in Genesis 6 to only evil “from his youth” in Genesis 8:2 illustrates how God used to flood to make room for humans who may be good; men are no longer described as exclusively evil.\(^94\) Second, this description contrasts with the theme of divine retribution present in many of the Babylonian stories. According to this verse, mankind has a general proclivity for evil; the righteous and the unrighteous are insufficient categories for describing the human condition. In *Gilgamesh*, Ea protects the righteous human he favors whereas the god Enlil destroys sinners through the flood; in the end, Ea chastises Enlil for destroying the good with the sinners, and he rewards Utnapishtim with immortality.\(^95\) Instead of a sorting out of the good from the bad which *Gilgamesh* depicts, Genesis depicts a total erasure of creation, and then a recreation starting with

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\(^91\) See lines 80-87 of tablet xi in “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” Pritchard, 68.

\(^92\) Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary*, 54.


\(^94\) “The key phrase [in verse 21] is ‘from his youth,’ not from birth or conception, implying that the tendency to evil may be curbed and redirected through the discipline of laws.” Sarna, 59.

Noah’s family. After the flood, humans remain ambiguous: they cannot simply be sorted out into good and bad. Instead, they need correction.

Before we discuss the covenant, the civil law, and the sanctioning of meat-eating, we should review how the text so far has anticipated Genesis 9. The creation account culminated in the creation of humans whose future way was both open and ambiguous. God welcomed humans to make their home upon the land, assuring them authority over other animals. God took humans from the ground, and placed them in Eden, where they lived in innocence without law. This venture failed when humans became aware of the knowledge of good and bad, and God removed them from Eden to live a toilsome life upon the ground, still without law. Civilization developed, and the first son, Cain, killed his own brother; God cursed Cain, but did not kill him. Instead, he protected him from any person who would want to avenge the death of Abel. However, mankind became so violent and evil that God decided to kill everyone in a flood; the problem of human violence, which God refused to curtail with capital punishment in Genesis 4, threatened the entire human project. God then wiped out the corrupted civilization. Because of the failure of the original human civilization, God has started over with the ark’s inhabitants, now correcting the evil that characterized those killed in the flood. For the original human civilization that existed before the flood required more direction and correction than the created order and God’s early directions supplied. Genesis 1-9 demonstrates how humans need the law and guidance of the covenant in Genesis 9; ultimately, this passage of the Torah justifies why humans need the guidance and civil law provided by the Torah.

In Genesis 9, God makes the first covenant. The covenant, which in Hebrew “comes from a word meaning *to bind together*,” is one of the principal themes of the Hebrew Bible: God makes a covenant with Abram in Genesis 12 which founds what becomes the Israelite nation.

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96 Sacks, 67.
This covenant is established through the patriarchs, and then the nation of Israel. God’s covenant with Israel develops new dimensions when he promises at Mt. Sinai to make them his chosen people, provided that they keep the covenant by obeying God and the law that he gives at Sinai.97 The language of the covenant between God and Israel—the blessing to subdue the land and to be fruitful and multiply—appears in Genesis 1 when God blesses man. But the characteristics of the covenant—explicit bonds between humans and God through the promise and through law—do not appear until Genesis 9. In Genesis 1-5, God tries to make a world where a covenant is unnecessary: he made the created order, affording the humans openness in the direction they may go, without law or explicit covenants to God or other humans. Eventually, both the created order and human social order require a covenant. Before the flood, in Genesis 1, God created a firmament to separate the ominous waters above from the terrestrial world below. After the firmament has “given way”98 and lets the waters above drown all life, God supplements the created order with a covenantal partnership between God and humans, a promise to never again allow such a flood to happen, and a rainbow in the clouds to signify this covenant so that both parties may remember it. The security, once guaranteed by the created order, now comes from the covenant, a bond made between God and the earth which is “external and explicit.”99

God binds himself to Noah’s family with a covenant that requires both parties to perform certain actions. In this new bond between man and God, God promises in Genesis 6:18 to establish a covenant with Noah and allow his family to escape the devastation of the flood, and in Genesis 9 he promises to never bring another flood to end all life. Humankind’s assignment, in their covenant with God, is to follow the civil law he prescribes in Genesis 9. The civil law organizes humans into a definite political community, citizens bound together under exclusive

97 See Exodus 19-20, particularly Exodus 19:5.
98 Sacks, 60.
99 Sacks, 67.
ties under a common rule of life. Genesis 8:19 precurses the formation of politic communities when the animals leave the ark according to their families, rather than according to their kinds as Genesis 7:14 describes them when they are inside the ark, which represents the new created order; the establishment of civil law in Genesis 9 is followed by the division of humans into nations, political communities, in Genesis 10-11. These definite political bonds formed over the course of Genesis 8-11 resolve the ambiguity in human social ties that Cain first suggested when he asked if he was his brother’s keeper.

The civil law— a people’s law enforced by the political community that governs their normative social relationships— that God prescribes to Noah’s family is meant to mend the violence and broken social relationships exemplified by the humans, particularly the murderers Cain and Lamech, in the previous chapters: it does so in three ways. First, the civil law establishes explicit bonds between humans. Whereas God did not desire anyone to kill Cain after he committed murder, in the covenant God will require the life, in capital punishment, “of man, of every man’s brother” who sheds human blood. This command hearkens back to the story of Cain in Genesis 4, which described the first murder and emphasized the word “brother” seven times. In the covenant, humans are commanded to be their brother’s keeper by communally putting to death the one who commits murder, even their own brother. Second, it is meant to limit murder as much as possible. God first tried to limit murder by cursing Cain and protecting him from vengeance, but this did not curb human violence. After God sees in Genesis 6 that man has become exceedingly evil, he accepts capital punishment as a necessary deterrent against excessive violence. Third, the civil law educates humans concerning the sanctity of life. In Genesis 9:4, God says that life is in the blood, and no blood, human or animal, shall be eaten. In verse 6, God says that whoever sheds human blood shall have his blood shed by humans. Both

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100 Trans. Cassuto, vol 2., 124.
the prescribed action and the language used—the Hebrew description of the punishment uses the same words as the description of the crime, but in reverse order—educate those who obey this law that all human life is equally valuable. By substituting the murderer’s life for the murder, the political community will understand the sanctity of human life, and how violating its sanctity through murder corrupts humans and pollutes the land as Genesis 6 and Numbers 35:33 suggest.

But why is the sanctioning for meat-eating included in the covenant? The text does not give an explicit answer. Meat-eating was not a part of the created order, and, like capital punishment, God does not sanction it until it becomes evident that humans need a civil law. Since the plant-based diet was God’s only direction to humans in the original order, his sanctioning of meat-eating requires a justification. The sanction is justified by complementing and accomplishing the same purposes and functions of the civil law.

The sanction complements the three functions of the civil law mentioned above. First, the new political bonds that the civil law establishes are exclusive to humans and allow meat-eating to be tolerated because animals to be excluded from the new political community. In Genesis 9, the strengthening of bonds between citizens entails a loosening of the bonds between humans and animals. This is similar to a story in Gilgamesh: Enkidu leaves his home among the animals to go to the human city and have sexual intercourse with a crafty prostitute. When he returns to the forest, the animals no longer desire his companionship.\(^{101}\) This has already happened in a similar way in Genesis 2; the man searched for a companion among the animals, but because they were not his kind, God made a new companion for him. Now, humans will establish bonds between themselves based on more than their distinct kind: the new bonds are political, beyond

\(^{101}\)See lines 21-35, tablet iv, in “The Epic of Gilgamesh,” 44.
the created order. These artificial measures are necessary to curtail the human violence that threatened the existence of humankind earlier in the narrative.

The sanctioning of meat-eating is accompanied by other forms of the loosened bond between humans and animals. The careful reader will note that when God blesses Noah’s family to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth—the same blessing given in Genesis 1—he does not bless Noah’s family to subdue the land or have dominion over the other creatures. Instead, God says in Genesis 9:3 that he will deliver all animals into their hands, and “the fear and the dread” of humans will be upon all animals. Just as in Genesis 1:28, God says that humans may fill the land without fear that the animal occupants will prevent them from making a home there. In Genesis 9, though, human relations with the animals are no longer described in terms of dominion, formal order; instead, they are described in terms of chaos, fear, and conquest. Furthermore, the harmony that existed between humans and animals in the original created order, characterized by their plant-diets, has been broken; violence against animals is now authorized. God has dissolved the harmonious bond that humans and animals once had in Genesis 1 in order to create new political bonds between humans that the animals cannot share with them.

Second, in this new social order, God both anticipates violence, by allowing meat-eating and demanding capital punishment for future murder, and attempts to curtail it by requiring that those who eat animals refrain from eating the blood. While man’s desire for meat is never made explicit, perhaps God expects violent humankind to inevitably kill animals, or want to kill them for meat. The civil law gives priority to humans in that it makes human murder punishable by death but sanctions the eating of animals. However, when any animal is killed, God commands that the blood shall not be eaten. In the very act of meat-eating, humans shall honor the principle of life by regarding the blood as sacred; this will educate them concerning the sanctity of all

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102 Sacks, 66.
animal life, the reason God originally gave humans only plants to eat. Every act of meat-eating, if it keeps this covenant, will recognize and adhere to the principle of life; this will address the unrestrained desire that caused the woman to take the fruit and break God’s command. Even though God anticipates human violence, he expects humans to acknowledge the contradiction in eating an animal whose life is sacred but whom God allows humans to eat.

Third, the combination of capital punishment and a sanctioning of meat-eating creates an artificial distinction between humans and animals that emphasizes the priority for human life that those under the civil law must now respect. In Genesis 9:4, God establishes that no blood shall be eaten, but in verse five he specifically distinguishes human blood as requiring the death of whoever sheds it. The sanctioning of shedding animal blood to obtain meat reinforces the principal goal of the civil law: to respect the sanctity of human life, now established in a civil code through political order that extends beyond the created order. In Genesis 1, God distinguished humans from animals by creating them in image of God, but this did not justify the taking of animal life for food. Ideally, God did not want any creature to be eaten. But Cain demonstrated a lack of understanding and morality when he killed his own brother and asked if he was his brother’s keeper. God responds by demanding a more articulate understanding of one’s social duties. To produce a more articulate answer to Cain’s question, God makes a sharp distinction between the animals that may absolutely be eaten and the humans that absolutely shall not be murdered The Mosaic Law eventually stipulates that some animals are clean to eat and some are not; this distinction between animals is referenced when God asks Noah to bring seven of every clean beast on the ark but only two of the unclean animals. ¹⁰³ Furthermore, the

¹⁰³ Genesis 7:2. It seems that Noah neglects to make this distinction in Genesis 7:7-9. See Sacks, 59-60.
Mosaic Law contains stipulations against the mistreatment of animals. Here, no distinction between what animals can be eaten or how they may be treated is made; every living thing may be eaten. This absolute sanctioning of eating any animal complements the absolute ban on murdering humans which the political community must uphold. The political community’s particular care for humans develops in the following chapters, Genesis 10-11, as humans divide into separate families and nations: humans develop a particular care for particular humans, their kin. This is the first step in addressing the problem posed by Cain. In Genesis 9, God emphasizes the duties humans have to all humans, and only humans, by creating an absolute distinction in the blood of humans and animals that was not apparent in the created order.

Interpreting the sanctioning of meat-eating as an integral part of God’s response to human violence explains why God allows such a puzzling turn from a plant-based diet to an omnivorous diet. Originally, eating other creatures was not a part of God’s order. This is explained by the principle of life’s sanctity which the civil law in Genesis 9 demonstrates. The assertion of “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” that Genesis teaches that animals are only for man’s benefit does not accurately interpret these chapters; God demonstrates a concern for animals, directing humans to respect animal life for reasons beyond man’s purposes. In Genesis, the principle of life cannot be simply respected because of the complications that human violence present. Cain’s act of murder against Abel was the first challenge to the principle of life. God initially responded by demanding that this principle be followed simply: no one was to retaliate against Cain. Eventually human violence became so prevalent that God deemed human civilization too corrupt to continue; if God were to try again to have humans

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104 Mosaic laws concerning animals include: animals must receive the same rest as humans receive on the Sabbath and the Sabbatical Year: Exodus 20:10 and Ex. 23:11. An ox must be able to eat as it works in the field: Deuteronomy 25:4. Any overburdened or fallen animal must be assisted: Ex. 23:5 and Deut. 22:4. No cow or sheep may be slaughtered on the same day as their young: Leviticus 22:28. A mother bird may not be taken with her young or eggs when an Israelite finds a bird nest: Deut. 22:6-7.
flourish on the earth, the new order would need to include guidance for man’s ambiguity and ignorance, as well as a rule of law to prevent excessive violence. When God began a new human society, starting with Noah’s family, he established the rule and guidance of law into the human order. As the human bond as one another’s keeper solidified under the law, God broke the harmony between humans and animals which was included in the created order of Genesis 1. The combination of capital punishment and meat-eating would delineate the peculiar and exclusive care that humans would not have to other humans. But every time a human would eat meat and refrain from eating the blood, they would remember man’s original diet of plants and the contradiction to the sanctity of all life that would occur every time one of God’s creatures became “meat for you.”

Works Cited


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105 Genesis 9:3, “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.” Trans. Sacks, 66.


