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The Human and the Divine in *Gilgamesh* and *Genesis*

The relationship between the human and the divine proves important to understand because of its implications on human nature. Two of the greatest works of ancient literature, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* and *The Book of Genesis*, attempt to shed light on this relationship. *Gilgamesh* depicts gods that display shockingly human behavior, such as conspiring with each other and expressing frightening fits of passion. On the other hand, *Genesis* depicts the sole God that also seems to share human characteristics, but is much more mysterious and difficult to understand. Despite the apparent differences between these divine entities, both texts describe the same fundamental relationship between the human and the divine. This fundamental relationship between the human and the divine is that the divine are the creators and the human is the created.

*Genesis* and *Gilgamesh* argue that the divine created man in their respective creation stories. To begin, one can look to the creation of man as told in *Genesis*. It says, “And God created the human in his image, in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them” (*Genesis I* 153). This passage essentially argues that man is the product of a divine idea. This is a groundbreaking argument because of its implications, such as the possibility of something inherently divine existing in humans. Therefore, the argument creates an understanding of the nature of man while also projecting a mysterious image of the nature of God. *Gilgamesh* attempts to provide a less mysterious image of the nature of the divine in its creation story of Enkidu. The story describes how Aruru, the mother of creation, “closed her eyes, and what Anu had commanded she formed in her mind. She moistened her hands, she pinched off some clay, she threw it into the wilderness, kneaded it, shaped it to her idea, and fashioned a man, a warrior, a hero: Enkidu the brave, as powerful and fierce as the war god Ninurta” (*Gilgamesh* 74). This passage not only provides the same argument that man is created in the image of a divine entity, but also provides interpretation as to what it means to be made in the image of a god. Part of the passage describes how Enkidu was made to be as powerful as the war god Ninurta. This detail indicates much of what was mentioned earlier in discussing *Genesis*, namely that much of what it means to be a human is to have some aspect of the divine. In Enkidu’s case, his divine nature stems from his similarity to the war god Ninurta. Additionally, in terms of what can be said about the nature of the divine, *Gilgamesh* appears to argue that much of what can be found in human nature can be found in the nature of the gods. This means that the argument is not that man is projecting their own nature on divine entities, but that divine entities are projecting their own nature on man. Therefore, *Gilgamesh* and *Genesis* both agree that the relationship between man and the divine is that man is the creation of the divine and that man inherits much of the nature of the divine.