2 The Fall from Eden

> She has taken up with a snake now. The other animals are glad, for she was always experimenting with them and bothering them; and I am glad, because the snake talks, and this enables me to get a rest. She says the snake advises her to try the fruit of that tree, and says the result will be a great and fine and noble education. . . . I advised her to keep away from the tree. She said she wouldn't. I forsee trouble. Will emigrate.
>
> —*Mark Twain, "Extracts from Adam's Diary"*

Two grand historical narratives explain how the human species arrived at the present moment in history. Both are Recovery Narratives, but the two stories have different plots, one upward, the other downward. The first story is the traditional biblical narrative of the fall from the Garden of Eden from which humanity can be redeemed through Christianity. But the garden itself can also be recovered. By the time of the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, the Christian narrative had merged with advances in science, technology, and capitalism to form the mainstream Recovery Narrative. The story begins with the precipitous fall from Eden followed by a long, slow, upward attempt to recreate the Garden of Eden on earth. The outcome is a better world for all people. This first story—the mainstream Recovery Narrative—is a story of upward progress in which humanity gains the power to manage and control the earth.

The second story, also a Recovery Narrative, instead depicts a long, slow decline from a prehistoric past in which the world was ecologically more pristine and society was more equitable for all people and for both genders. The decline continues to the present, but the possibility and, indeed, the absolute necessity of a precipitous, rapid Recovery exists today and could be achieved through a sustainable ecology and an equitable society. This second story is one told by many environmentalists and feminists.

Both stories are enormously compelling, and both reflect the beliefs and hopes of many people for achieving a better world. They differ fundamentally, however, on who and what wins out. In the mainstream story, humanity regains its life of ease at the expense of the earth; in the environmental story, the earth is both the victim of exploitation and the beneficiary of restoration.

Women play pivotal roles in the two stories, as cause and/or victims of decline and, along with men, as restorers of a reclaimed planet. But, I argue that a third story, one of a partnership between humanity and the earth and between women and men, that draws on many of the positive aspects of the two stories is also emerging. In this chapter I develop, compare, and critically assess the roots and broad outlines of these stories.

The Christian narrative

The Christian story of Fall and Recovery begins with the Garden of Eden as told in the Bible. The Christian story is marked by a precipitous fall from a pristine past. The initial lapsarian moment, or loss of innocence, is the decline from garden to desert as the first couple is cast from the light of an ordered paradise into a dark, disorderly wasteland to labor in the earth. Instead of giving fruit readily, the earth now extracts human labor. The blame for the Fall is placed on woman.

The biblical Garden of Eden story has three central chapters: Creation, temptation, and expulsion (later referred to as the Fall). A woman, Eve, is the central actress, and the story's plot is declensionist (a decline from Eden) and tragic. The end result is a poorer state of both nature and human nature. The valence of woman is bad; the end valence of nature is bad. Men become the agents of transformation. After the Fall, men must labor in the earth, to produce food. They become the earthly saviors who strive, through their own agricultural labor, to re-create the lost garden on earth, thereby turning the tragedy of the Fall into the comedy of Recovery. The New Testament adds the Resurrection—the time when the earth and all its creatures, especially humans, are reunited with God to recreate the original oneness in a heavenly paradise. The biblical Fall and Recovery story has become the mainstream narrative shaping and legitimating the course of Western culture.

The Bible offers two versions of the Christian origin story that preceded the Fall. In the Genesis 1 version, God created the land, sea, grass, herbs, and fruit; the stars, sun, and moon; and the birds, whales, cattle, and beasts, after which he made "man in his own image . . . male and female created he them." The couple was instructed "to be fruitful and multiply, replenish the earth, and subdue it," and was given "dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth on the face of the earth." This version of creation is thought to have been contributed by the Priestly school of Hebrew scholars in the fifth century B.C.E. These scholars edited and codified earlier material into the first five books (or Pentateuch) of the Old Testament, adding the first chapter of Genesis.[1]

The alternative Garden of Eden story of creation, temptation, and expulsion (Genesis 2 and 3) derives from an earlier school. Writers in Judah in the ninth century B.C.E. produced a version of the Pentateuch known as the J source, *The Book of J*, or the Yahwist version (since Yahweh is the Hebrew deity). These writers recorded the oral traditions embodied in songs and folk stories handed

down through previous centuries. In addition to the Garden of Eden story, these records include the heroic narratives of Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses; the escape from Egypt; and the settlement in the promised land of Canaan.[2]

In the Genesis 2 story, God first created "man" from the dust. The name Adam derives from the Hebrew word *adama*, meaning earth or arable land. *Adama* is a feminine noun, meaning an earth that gives birth to plants. God then created the Garden of Eden, the four rivers that flowed from it, and the trees for food (including the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the center). He put "the man" in the garden "to dress and keep it," formed the birds and beasts from dust, and brought them to Adam to name. Only then did he create "the woman" from Adam's rib: "And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man."[3]

Biblical scholar Theodore Hiebert argues that the Yahwist's Eden narrative is told from the perspective of an audience outside the garden familiar with the post-Edenic landscape. The use of the word *before* in the phrases that described God making "every plant of the field before it was in the earth," and "every herb of the field before it grew" signify the pasturage and field crops of the post-Edenic cultivated land in which the listener is situated. Similarly, the phrases that note that "God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" and that "a mist from the earth" came that "watered the whole face of the ground" indicate a post-Edenic rain-based agriculture centered on cultivation of the *adama*, or arable land.[4]

The Garden of Eden described in Genesis 2, however, is a different landscape from that of the post-Edenic *adama*; it is filled with spring-fed water out of which the four rivers flow. It contains the "beasts of the field," "fowls of the air," cattle, snakes, and fruit trees, including the fig, as well as humans "to dress and keep it." The image of the garden in which animals, plants, man, and woman live together in peaceful abundance in a well-watered garden is a powerful image; it provides the starting and ending points for both plots of the overarching Recovery Narrative.

Hiebert compares the garden to a desert oasis irrigated by springs. "The term 'garden' (*gan*)," he notes, "is itself the common designation in biblical Hebrew for irrigation-supported agriculture." Irrigation agriculture was typified by the river valley civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, in which rivers overflowed onto the land and water was channeled into ditches running to fields. Of the four rivers mentioned in Genesis 2, two are the Tigris (Hiddekel) and Euphrates of Mesopotamia, while the Pison and Gihon "are placed by the Yahwist south of Israel in the area of Arabia and Ethiopia (2:11–13), and have been identified by some as the headwaters of the Nile," notes Hiebert. The Edenic landscape is thus spring-fed, river-based, and irrigated, whereas the post-Edenic landscape initiated by the temptation is rain-based. Irrigation itself later becomes a technology of humanity's hoped-for return to the garden.[5]

Genesis 3 begins with "the woman's" temptation by the serpent and the consumption of the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. (In the Renaissance this fruit became an apple, owing to a play on the Latin word bad, or *malum*, which also means apple). The story details the loss of innocence through the couple's discovery of nakedness followed by God's expulsion from the garden of Adam and his "wife," whom he now calls Eve, because she is to become "the mother of all the living." Adam is condemned to eat bread "in the sweat of thy face," and is "sent forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground (the *adama* or arable land) from whence he was taken," the same *adama* to which he will return after death. But because Adam has listened to his wife, the *adama* was cursed. Thorns and thistles would henceforth grow in the ground where the "herb of the field" (field crops) must be grown for bread. After the couple's expulsion, God places "at the east of the garden of Eden" the cherubim and flaming sword to guard the tree of life.[6]

The landscape into which Adam and Eve are expelled is described by Evan Eisenberg in *The Ecology of Eden*. By 1100 B.C.E. the Israelites were farming the hills of Judea and Samaria in Canaan with ox-drawn scratch plows and planting wheat, barley, and legumes such as peas and lentils. They pastured sheep, goats, and cattle, and grew grapes in vineyards, olives on hillside groves, and figs, apricots, almonds, and pomegranates in orchards. "Where least disturbed," Eisenberg notes, "the landscape was [a] sort of open Mediterranean woodland . . . with evergreen oak, Aleppo pine, and pistachio. . . . Elsewhere this would dwindle to . . . a mix of shrubs and herbs such as rosemary, sage, summer savory, rock rose, and thorny burnet. The settlers cleared a good deal of this forest for pasture and cropland." They captured water in cisterns and terraced the land to retain the rich, but shallow red soil for planting, using the drier areas for pasturage. The arid hill country in which arable and pasturage lands was mingled was therefore the landscape that would be inhabited by the descendants of Adam and Eve.[7]

Genesis 4 recounts the fate of Adam and Eve's sons, Abel ("keeper of sheep"—a pastoralist) and Cain ("tiller of the ground"—a farmer). God accepts Abel's lamb as a first fruit, but rejects Cain's offering of the "fruit of the ground," grown on the *adama*. Although the seminomadic pastoralists and farmers of the Near East often existed in mutual support, they also engaged in conflict. Cain's killing of Abel may represent both that conflict and the historical ascendancy of settled farmers over nomadic pastoralists. A second explanation stems from the fact that Israelite farms in the hill country incorporated both farming and pastoralism into a subsistence way of life. According to Hiebert, the elder son was responsible for the tilling of the land, whereas the younger son was the keeper of the sheep. Hiebert argues that God's banishment of Cain after the killing of Abel represents a prohibition against settling disputes through the killing of kin.[8]

When human beings fell into a more labor-intensive way of life, their view of nature reflected this decline. Nature acting through God meted out floods, droughts, plagues, and disasters in response to humanity's sins or bountiful

Figure 2.1 Adam and Eve enter the enclosed, circular Garden of Eden in lockstep. The Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil are at the center of the Garden, watered by a fountain, while the four rivers flow from the Garden. Ludolphus de Saxonia, *Vita Christi* (Antwerp, Gerard Leeu, 1487). Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Figure 2.2 In the background Eve, tempted by the serpent, holds the apple from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as Adam looks on. In the foreground Adam and Eve, having tasted the fruit, are expelled from the Garden, no longer in lockstep, leaving the angel with the flaming sword to guard the Tree of Life. *Adam and Eve with a Serpent from Heures à l'usage de Rome*, 1488 by J. J. du Pré. Reproduced in *The Garden of Eden* by John M. Prest, 1982 and originally from *Medieval Gardens* by Sir Frank Crisp, 1924. Reference (shelfmark) 19183 d.26.

harvests in response to obedience. J. L. Russell notes that the Christian interpreter Paul "regarded the whole of nature as being in some way involved in the fall and redemption of man. He spoke of nature as 'groaning and travailing' (Romans 8.22)—striving blindly towards the same goal of union with Christ to which the Church is tending, until finally it is re-established in that harmony with man and God which was disrupted by the Fall." While the term *fall* to characterize the expulsion or going forth from Eden is absent from the Bible, it becomes commonplace in the ensuing Christian tradition. Beginning with St. Augustine, the story is interpreted as a Fall that can be undone by a savior.[9]

Before the Fall, nature was an entirely positive presence. The garden, which is the beginning and end of the Recovery Narrative, is an idealized landscape. The beasts and herbs of Genesis 1 are described as "very good," as are the cattle, fowl, beasts, and trees in the Genesis 2 Garden of Eden. The dust of Genesis 2, from which "man" was formed and which was watered by "a mist from the earth," is positive in valence. The ground, from which the other creatures are made is positive as well. But after the couple disobeys God, the ground is cursed. Adam eats of it in sorrow, and it brings forth thorns and thistles. The serpent changes from being "more subtle" than the other beasts to being "cursed above all cattle and above every beast of the field." In the Christian tradition, the thorns, thistles, and serpent symbolize barren desert and infertile ground, a negative nature from which humanity must recover to regain the garden.[10]

With the Fall from Eden, humanity abandons an original, "untouched" nature and enters into history. Nature is now a fallen world and humans fallen beings. But this Fall through the lapsarian moment sets up the opposite—or Recovery—moment. The effort to recover Eden henceforth encompasses all of human history. Reattaining the lost garden, its life of ease from labor, and its innocent happiness (and, I would add, the potential for human partnership with the earth) become the primary human endeavor. The Eden narrative is, according to Henry Goldschmidt, "a story of originary presence which is subsequently usurped by difference; and then of a final presence, reinstituted, sweeping away the unfortunate misadventure."[11]

The Recovery story begins with the Fall from the garden into the desert (and the loss of an original partnership with the land), moves upward to the re-creation of Eden on earth (the earthly paradise), and culminates with the vision of attainment of a heavenly paradise, a recovered garden. Paradise is defined as heaven, a state of bliss, an enclosed garden or park—an Eden. Derived from a Sumerian word, *paradise* was once the name of a fertile place that had become dry and barren; the Persian word for park, or enclosure, evolves through Greek and Latin to take on the meaning of garden, so that by the medieval period Eden is depicted as an enclosed garden. The religious path to a heavenly paradise, practiced throughout the early Christian and medieval periods, incorporated the promise of salvation to atone for the original sin of tasting the forbidden fruit. In the Christian story, time has two poles—beginning and end, creation and salvation.[12]

The resurrection or end drama, heralded in the New Testament, envisions an earth reunited with God when the redeemed earthly garden merges into a higher heavenly paradise. The second coming of Christ was to occur either at the outset of the thousand-year period of his reign of peace on earth, as foretold in Revelation 20 (the millennium), or at the Last Judgment, when the faithful were reunited with God at the resurrection. Since medieval times, millenarian sects have awaited the advent of Christ on earth.[13]

The Parousia is the idea of the end of the world, expressed as the hope set forth in the New Testament that "he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead." It depicts a redeemed earth and redeemed humans. "The scene

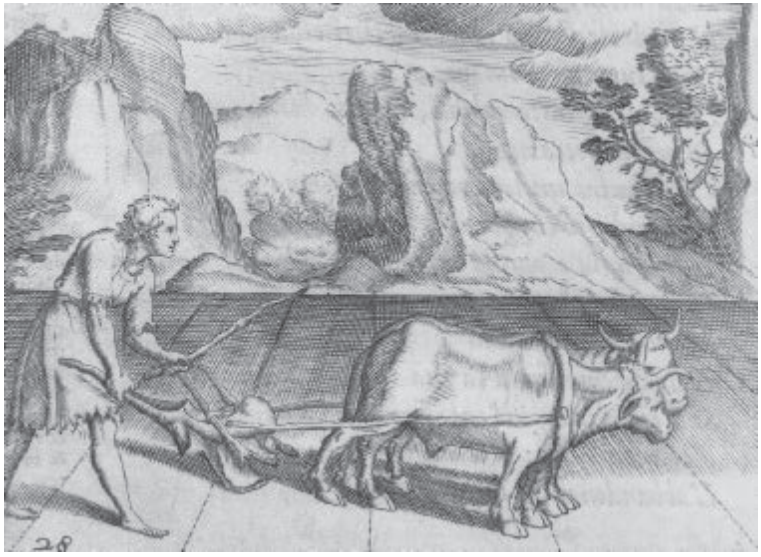

Figure 2.3 After the expulsion from Eden, Adam is forced to till the barren ground with plow and oxen. G. B. Andreini. "Adamo," *L'Adamo, Sacra Rapresentatione* (Milan, 1617), p. 110. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

Figure 2.4 After the Fall, nature becomes a disorderly wilderness in which animals, who once lived in harmony, devour each other, while Adam and Eve are forced to live in caves and clothe themselves in skins. G. B. Andreini. "Eua, Adamo," *L'Adamo, Sacra Rapresentatione* (Milan, 1617), p. 115. Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California

of the future consummation is a radically transformed earth," writes A. L. Moore. *Parousia* derives from the Latin *parere*, meaning to produce or bring forth. Hope for Parousia was a motivating force behind the Church's missionary work, both in its early development and in the New World; Christians prepared for this expected age of glory when God would enter history. Moore notes, "The coming of this Kingdom was conceptualized as a sudden catastrophic moment, or as preceded by the Messianic kingdom, during which it was anticipated that progressive work would take place."[14]

The modern narrative

A secular version of the Recovery story became paramount during the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, one in which the earth itself became a new Eden. This is the mainstream narrative of modern Western culture, one that continues to this day—it is *our* story, one so compelling we cannot escape its grasp. In the 1600s, Europeans and New World colonists began a massive effort to reinvent the whole earth in the image of the Garden of Eden. Aided by the Christian doctrine of redemption and the inventions of science, technology, and capitalism, the longterm goal of the Recovery project has been to turn the entire earth into a vast cultivated garden. The seventeenth-century concept of Recovery came to mean more than Recovery from the Fall. It also entailed restoration of health, reclamation of land, and recovery of property. The strong interventionist version in Genesis 1 validates Recovery through domination, while the softer Genesis 2 version advocates dressing and keeping the garden through human management (stewardship). Human labor would redeem the souls of men and women, while the earthly wilderness would be redeemed through cultivation and domestication.[15]

The Garden of Eden origin story depicts a comic or happy state of human existence, while the Fall exemplifies a tragic state. Stories and descriptions about nature and human nature told by explorers, colonists, settlers, and developers present images of and movement between comic (positive) or tragic (negative) states. Northrop Frye describes the elements of these two states. In comic stories, he notes, the human world is a community and the animal world comprises domesticated flocks and birds of peace. The vegetable world is a garden or park with trees, while the mineral world is a city or temple with precious stones and starlit domes. And the unformed world is depicted as a river. In tragic stories, the human world is an anarchy of individuals and the animal world is filled with birds and beasts of prey (such as wolves, vultures, and serpents). The vegetable world is a wilderness, desert, or sinister forest, the mineral world is filled with rocks and ruins, and the unformed world is a sea or flood. All of these elements are present in the two versions of the Recovery Narrative.[16]

The plot of the tragedy moves from a better or comic state to a worse or tragic state (from the Garden of Eden to a desert wilderness). The comedy, on the other hand, moves from an initial tragic state to a comic outcome (from a

Table 2.1 Reinventing Eden: Narratives of Western Culture

Christian	*Modern*	*Environmentalist*	*Feminist*
Eden	Golden Age	Pristine Wilderness	Matriarchy or Equality
Fall	Dark Ages	Ecological Crisis	Patriarchy
Birth of Christ	Renaissance	Environmental Movement	Feminist Movement
Heaven	Enlightenment, Capitalism	Restored Earth	Emancipation, Equality

desert to a recovered garden). Thus, the primary narrative of Western culture has been a precipitous, tragic Fall from the Garden of Eden, followed by a long, slow, upward Recovery to convert the fallen world of deserts and wilderness into a new earthly Eden. Tragedy is turned into comedy through human labor in the earth and the Christian faith in redemption. During the Scientific Revolution, the Christian and modern stories merged to become the mainstream Recovery Narrative of Western culture (see Table 2.1).

The role of gender

The way in which gender is encoded into the mainstream Recovery Narrative is crucial to the structure of the story. In the Christian tradition, God—the original oneness—is male, while in the garden the woman (Eve) is subordinate to the man (Adam). The fall from the garden is caused by the woman, Eve; Adam is the innocent bystander, forced to pay the consequences as his sons, Abel and Cain, are constrained to develop pastoralism and farming. While fallen Adam becomes the inventor of the tools and technologies that will restore the garden, fallen Eve becomes the nature that must be tamed into submission. In much of the imagery of Western culture, Eve is inherently connected to and associated symbolically with nature and the garden. In the European and American traditions, male science and technology mitigate the effects of fallen nature. The good state that keeps unruly nature in check is invented, engineered, and operated by men, and the good economy that organizes the labor needed to restore the garden historically has been male directed.

In Western culture, nature as Eve appears in three forms. As original Eve, nature is virgin, pure, and light—land that is pristine or barren but has the potential for development. As fallen Eve, nature is disorderly and chaotic; a wilderness, wasteland, or desert requiring improvement; dark and witchlike, the victim and mouthpiece of Satan as serpent. As mother Eve, nature is an improved garden; a nurturing earth bearing fruit; a ripened ovary; maturity. Original Adam is the image of God as creator, initial agent, activity. Fallen Adam appears as the agent of earthly transformation, the hero who redeems

the fallen land. Father Adam is the image of God as patriarch, law, and rule, the model for kingdom and state.

These denotions of nature as female and agency as male are encoded as symbols and myths into land that has the potential for development but needs the male hero—Adam. But such symbols are not "essences" because they do not represent characteristics necessary or essential to being female or male. They are historically constructed meanings derived from the origin stories of European settlers and the cultural and economic practices they transported to and developed in the New World. These gender symbols are not immutable; they can be changed by exposing their presence and rethinking history.

The male/female hierarchy encoded into the Genesis texts both consciously and implicitly socializes the young into behavioral patterns. Eve, after ingesting the fruit, is told she will be ruled by her husband, and the conflation of animals with women as helpmates is also explicit. In all versions of the story, Eve became Adam's "wife" after the two became one flesh, and she is to be "ruled over" or "dominated" by her husband after she disobeys God.[17]

But there is another way to read the gendered message. In the feminist reading, Genesis 1's simultaneous creation of men and women indicates their potential equality ("male and female created He them"). Recovery, therefore, is an effort to reclaim an original gender equality or partnership. Genesis 2, on the other hand, depicts the creation sequentially, first, of a real, material male body from dust and, second, woman from the body of the male. Hence Eve is second in the order of creation, implying the subjection of woman to man.[18] But some feminists argue that Eve is not derivative of Adam; he was not awake at her creation, nor was he even consulted in advance. "Like man, woman owes her life solely to God," states Phyllis Trible, "to claim that the rib means inferiority or subordination is to assign the man qualities over the woman which are not in the narrative itself." Eve's role in initiating the Fall can also be debated. Was she the weaker, more vulnerable sex and hence susceptible to the serpent's temptation? Or, was she actually the First Scientist—the more independent and curious of the two—as in the Mark Twain epigraph earlier. In this reading, Eve was the one who questioned the established order of things and initiated change. As original biologist, Eve talks to the snake and nature rather than to God as does Adam. As prototypic scientist, Eve could hold the key to recovering Eden through a new science.[19]

While the Bible does not employ the term *partner* for the male–female relationship, today some people are rethinking the Genesis passages in terms of partnership. Theologian Ray Maria McNamara interprets the creation story in Genesis 1 in terms of a partnership between God and the earth. She notes that although God said "Let the earth bring forth grass and herb" it was actually the earth as an active partner that "brought forth grass and herb . . . and the tree yielding fruit." Another contribution to a partnership interpretation is made by the Reverend William M. Boyce Jr., who offers a free translation of several of the Genesis verses. He portrays Adam and Eve as helpers, partners, and colleagues to one another and a God who views the whole of creation as very, very good.[20]

Stewardship versus Dominion

While the role of gender is central to the story, equally critical is the question of human dominion versus stewardship of nature. If Genesis 1 is accepted as the ethical model, as it is in mainstream Western culture, then the domination of nature could be interpreted as the ideal pathway to Recovery. But if Genesis 2 represents the ethical ideal (humans as stewards over the animals), then Recovery could mean that humans are the caretakers and stewards of nature. The Bible and the Torah, in Christian and Judaic traditions, provide interesting variations on the language of the two creation stories leading to dominance or stewardship. The terms *dominion, mastery, subduing, conquering*, and *ruling* predominate in different translations of the Genesis 1 story. In order to have dominion, men and women must "be fruitful," "be fertile," "become many," "increase," "multiply," "grow in number," "have many children," and then "replenish," "fill," "fill up," and "people" the "earth" or the "land."[21] If the fall from Eden entails the loss of immortality bestowed by the tree of life, humans can henceforth attain immortality only through sexual procreation. Thus, in the mainstream story of Western culture, to recover the Garden of Eden means that people must not only convert the earthly wilderness into a garden, but must also replenish the earth by expanding the human population over space and time. The Genesis 1 ethic, claims that humans must "replenish the earth and subdue it." Or, as historian Lynn White Jr. argued in 1967, it is "God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends."[22]

Genesis 2 presents stewardship as an ethical alternative to the domination of nature. God puts "man" into the Garden of Eden and instructs him "to dress it and to keep it." The Genesis 2:15 ethic is often interpreted as the stewardship of nature, as opposed to the Genesis 1:28 ethic of dominion or mastery. In Genesis 2, the earth is a garden—a local plot of land rather than a vast area for spatial conquest—and the man is commanded to "dress," "keep," "tend," "guard," and "watch over" it. According to ecologist René Dubos, God "placed man in the Garden of Eden not as a master but rather in a spirit of stewardship." For many religious sects wishing to embrace an ecological ethic, stewardship is the most persuasive ethic that is also consistent with biblical traditions. Stewardship is a caretaker ethic, but it is still anthropocentric inasmuch as nature is created for human use.[23] Moreover, Nature is not an actor, but is rendered docile.

Throughout most of Western history, the biblical mandates of stewardship and dominion have sometimes been explicitly separated and at other times implicitly merged. For example, medieval enclosed gardens were often protected, carefully stewarded spaces, while eighteenth-century garden estates were vast displays of dominion and power. Early American farms ranged from small patches in the forest tended mainly for family provisions to large plantations and capitalist ranches that dominated the landscape. While the former exemplify potential partnerships between humanity and the land, the latter represent the potential for human mastery over the earth. Colonists, planters, and

westward pioneers often explicitly cited the Genesis 1:28 mandate in order to justify expansion. In Western culture, the Genesis 1 and 2 accounts have usually been conflated. In the mainstream Recovery project, humanity has turned the entire earth into a vast garden by mastering nature. The Genesis 1:28 ethic of dominion has provided the rationale for the Recovery of the garden lost in Genesis 2 and 3, submerging the stewardship ethic of Genesis 2:15.

When Adam and Eve tasted the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, humans acquired their potential omniscience of nature. Wanting to become more like God, humanity has craved knowledge of everything. Since the seventeenth century, mainstream Western culture has pursued the pathway to Eden's Recovery by using Christianity, science, technology, and capitalism in concert. That human dominion over nature, however, has costs in terms of the depletion of the planet's resources.[24]

The Genesis stories provide two ethical alternatives, dominion and stewardship—both of which are anthropocentric. They do not explicitly acknowledge nonanthropocentric ethics, such as ecocentrism in which humanity is only one of a number of equal parts—an ecocentric ethic; nor is biocentrism a possibility, in which value is grounded in life itself, rather than being centered on humanity. But another form of ethics is the partnership ethic I propose that posits nature and humanity as equal, interacting, mutually responsive partners (see Chapter 11). This ethic combines human actions and nature's actions in a dynamic relationship with each other. Here nature is not created specifically for human use, nor are women and animals seen as helpmates for "man." Rather, human life and biotic life exist in mutual support, reciprocity, and partnership with each other. Gardens could exemplfy places in which the practice of gardening is a caretaking of the soil and the life it generates.[25]

Environmentalist and feminist narratives

An alternative to the mainstream story of Fall and Recovery is told by many environmentalists and feminists. This second narrative begins in a Stone-Age Garden of Eden and depicts a gradual, rather than precipitous, loss of a pristine condition. It uses archeological, anthropological, and ecological data, along with myth and art, to re-create a story of decline. Both environmental and feminist accounts idealize an Edenic prehistory in which both sexes lived in harmony with each other and nature, but they are nevertheless compelling in their critique of environmental disruption and the subjugation of both women and nature. When viewed critically, both can contribute to a new narrative of sustainable partnership between humanity and nature.

One version of the environmental narrative is exemplified by the work of philosopher Max Oelschlaeger. Paleolithic people, he notes, did not distinguish between nature and culture, but saw themselves "as one with plants and animals, rivers and forests, as part of a larger, encompassing whole. . . ." In that deep past, people in gathering/hunting bands lived sustainably and "comfortably in the wilderness," albeit within cycles of want and plenty.

Contained within the sacred oneness of the *Magna Mater* (the Great Mother), hunters followed rituals that respected animals and obeyed rules for preparing food and disposing of remains. Cave paintings, for example, reveal human-animal hybrids that suggest identity with the *Magna Mater*, while the cave itself is her womb. Although myth rather than science explained life, Stone-Age peoples, argues Oelschlaeger, were just as intelligent as their "modern" counterparts.[26]

Oelschlaeger sees humankind's emergence from the original oneness with the *Magna Mater* as the beginning of a wrenching division, just as birth is a traumatic separation from the human mother. He writes, "No one knows for certain how long prehistoric people existed in an Edenlike condition of hunting-gathering, but 200,000 years or more is not an unreasonable estimate for the hegemony of the Great Hunt. Even while humankind lived the archaic life, clinging conceptually to the bosom of the *Magna Mater*, the course of cultural events contained the seeds of an agricultural revolution, since prehistoric peoples were practicing rudimentary farming and animal husbandry."[27]

Oelschlaeger's narrative is one of gradual decline from the Paleolithic era rather than a precipitous fall as depicted in the Genesis 3 story. Near the end of the last ice age, around 10,000 B.C.E., changes in climate disrupted Paleolithic ecological relations. Animals and grains were gradually domesticated for herding and cultivation, heralding a change to pastoral and horticultural ways of life, particularly in the Near East. Once humans became agriculturists, Oelschlaeger observes, "the almost paradisiacal character of prehistory was irretrievably lost." Differences between humans and animals, male and female, people and nature became more distinct.[28] Humanity lost the intimacy it once had with the *Magna Mater*: "Western culture was now alienated from the Great Mother of the Paleolithic Mind."[29]

The first environmental problems stemming from large-scale agriculture occurred in Mesopotamia. Canals stretched from the Tigris to the Euphrates, bringing fertility to thousands of square miles of cropland; but as these irrigation waters evaporated, salts accumulated in the soils and reduced productivity. Oelschlager suggests that agriculture marks a decline from an Edenic past: "If the thesis that agriculture underlies humankind's turn upon the environment, even if out of climatological exigency, is cogent, then the ancient Mediterranean theater is where the 'fall from Paradise' was staged. . . ."[30]

In the Near East, the great town-based cultures emerged around 4000 B.C.E. By about 1000 B.C.E., the ancient tribes of Yahweh had become a single kingdom, ruled by David, that practiced rain-based agriculture. The God Yahweh above the earth represents a rupture with the *Magna Mater* of the Paleolithic era and a legitimization of the settled agriculture and pastoralism of the Neolithic era. The Hebrews rebelled against sacred animals as idols and placed Yahweh as the one god above and outside of nature. Time was no longer viewed as a cyclical return, but as a linear history with singular determinative events. As the "chosen people," Hebrew agriculturists and pastoralists became part of a broad-based transition from gathering/hunting to farming/herding.[31]

Ecologically, the fall from Eden, told in Genesis 2, may reflect the differences between gathering/hunting and farming/herding initiated thousands of years earlier. In the Garden of Eden's age of gathering, Adam and Eve pick the fruits of the trees without having to labor in the earth. The transition from foraging and hunting to settled agriculture took place some 9,000 to 10,000 years ago (7000–8000 B.C.E.) with the domestication of wheat and barley in the oak forests and steppes of the Near East. Around 5,000 years ago (3200–3100 B.C.E.), fruits such as the olive, grape, date, pomegranate, and fig were domesticated. By 600 B.C.E., when the biblical stories were codified, fruit trees were cultivated throughout the Near East. The Genesis 2 story may reflect the state of farming at the time and the labor required for tilling fields as opposed to tending and harvesting fruit trees.[32]

The tilling, planting, harvesting, and storing of wheat and barley represents a form of settled agriculture in which the earth was managed for grain production. "By the time the Genesis stories were composed," writes John Passmore, "man had already embarked on the task of transforming nature. In the Genesis stories [he] justifies his actions."[33] In Genesis 1, the anthropocentric God of the Hebrews commands that the earth be subdued. This represents a rupture with the nature gods of the past that occurred during the transition from polytheism to monotheism and was codified during the years of Israelite exile in Babylon between 587 and 538 B.C.E.

During the Iron Age (1200–1000 B.C.E.), the cultures of Israel and Canaan had overlapped. Canaanite mythology included a pantheon of deities: the patriarch El; his consort and mother-goddess, Asherah; the storm-god Baal, and his sister/consort Anat. Although the worship of Yahweh predominated, Israelites also worshipped El, Baal, and Asherah. During the period of the monarchy (ca. 1000–587 B.C.E.), the figure of Yahweh assimilated characteristics of the other deities, and Israel then rejected Baal and Asherah as part of its religion. "By the end of the monarchy," states Mark S. Smith, "much of the spectrum of religious practice had largely disappeared; monolatrous Yahwism was the norm in Israel, setting the stage for the emergence of Israelite monotheism."[34]

Monotheism represented an irrevocable break with the natural world. Henri and H. A. Frankfort note that the emergence of monotheism represents the highest level of abstraction and constitutes the "emancipation of thought from myth." They write, "The dominant tenet of Hebrew thought is the absolute transcendence of God. Yahweh is not in nature. . . . The God of the Hebrews is pure being, unqualified, ineffable. . . . Hence all concrete phenomena are devaluated." Although God had human characteristics, he was not human; although God had characteristics assimilated from other deities, he was the One God, not one among many gods.[35]

From an ecological perspective, the separation of God from nature constitutes a rupture with nature. God is not nature or of nature. God is unchanging, nature is changing and inconstant. The human relationship to nature was not one of *I* to *thou*, not one of subject to subject, nor of a human being to a nature alive with gods and spirits. The intellectual construction of a transcendent God

is yet another point in a narrative of decline. The separation of God from nature legitimates humanity's separation from nature and sets up the possibility of human domination and control over nature. In the agricultural communities of the Old Testament, humanity is the link between the soil and God. Humans are of the soil, but separate from and above the soil: they till the land with plows and reap the harvest with scythes; they clear the forests and pollute the rivers; their goats and sheep devour the hillsides and erode the soil. Over time, the natural landscape is irrevocably transformed. At the same time, however, nature is an unpredictible actor in the story. Noah's flood, plagues of locusts, earthquakes, droughts, and devastating diseases inject uncertainties into the outcome. Efforts to control nature come up against chaotic events that upset the linearity of the storyline and create temporary or permanent setbacks.[36]

The environmentalist narrative of decline initiated by the transition to agriculture continues to the present. Tools and technologies allow people to spread over the entire globe and to subdue the earth. The colonizers denude the earth for ores and build cities and highways across the land. Despite this destruction, however, environmentalists hope for a Recovery that reverses the decline by means of planetary restoration. The environmental Recovery begins with the conservation and preservation movements of the nineteenth century and continues with the environmental movement of the late twentieth century.

Feminist narratives

Many feminists likewise see history as a downward spiral from a utopian past in which women were held in equal or even higher esteem than men. This storyline was developed in the nineteenth century by Marxist philosopher Friedrich Engels, who saw the "worldwide defeat of the female sex" at the dawn of written history, and by anthropologists such as Johann Bachofen, August Bebel, and Robert Briffault. It was elaborated in a series of compelling studies by twentieth-century feminists such as Jane Harrison, Helen Diner, Esther Harding, Elizabeth Gould Davis, Merlin Stone, Adrienne Rich, Françoise d'Eaubonne, Marija Gimbutas, Pamela Berger, Gerda Lerner, Monica Sjöö, Barbara Mor, Riane Eisler, Elinor Gadon, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and a host of other feminists and ecofeminists. Like the environmental story, the feminist story captures the imagination by its symbolic force and its dramatic loss of female power. But like the environmental narrative, it must be critically evaluated for its overly utopian past from which women "fell" and its polarization of the sexes into positive female valences and negative male valences.[37]

In broad outlines the story of the decline of women, goddesses, and female symbolism woven by feminist writers is as follows. Elizabeth Gould Davis in *The First Sex*, sets out the storyline:

> When recorded history begins we behold the finale of the long pageant of pre-history. . . . On the stage, firmly entrenched on her ancient throne, appears woman, the heroine of the play. About her, her industrious

> subjects perform their age-old roles. Peace, Justice, Progress, Equality play their parts with a practiced perfection. . . . Off in the wings, however, we hear a faint rumbling—the . . . jealous complaints of the new men who are no longer satisfied with their secondary role in society. . . . [T]he rebellious males burst onstage, overturn the queen's throne, and take her captive. . . . The queen's subjects—Democracy, Peace, Justice, and the rest—flee the scene in disarray. And man, for the first time in history, stands triumphant, dominating the stage as the curtain falls.[38]

This story of decline from a past dominated by female cultural symbols and powerful female deities into one of female subordination is presented by many feminist writers. The plot is a downward trajectory throughout prehistory and written history in which female power is lost or obscured. Recovery, however, can occur with emancipation, social and economic equality, and the return of powerful cultural icons that validate women's power and promise. Merlin Stone conveys the argument when she writes that in the Neolithic era (ca. 7000 B.C.E.) people worshipped a female creator, a great goddess who was overthrown with the advent of newer religions. The loss of paradise, she holds, is the loss of a female deity. The beginnings of this narrative occur in the ancient Near East with the overthrow of goddess worshipping horticulturalists by warriors on horseback.[39]

Horticulturists who lived during the period from 7000 to 3500 B.C.E. in Old Europe—the area of present-day Greece and the former Yugoslavia—were, according to archeologist Marija Gimbutas, apparently peaceful groups who did not develop destructive weapons. Men and women were buried side by side, indicating equal status. Their lives revolved around fertility rituals based on the female principle. Birth, death, and regeneration were reflected in statues of female deities with large buttocks, pregnant bellies, and cylindrical necks. The concepts of male and female, animal and human, were fused. Nature was venerated. Artifacts show large eggs with snakes wound around them that symbolized the cosmos, while fish, water birds, butterflies, and bees captured the vibrancy of the natural world. Gimbutas's interpretation of grave sites as representing equality and her conjectures about the symbolic meanings of markers on vases and statues have been questioned, but her work is nonetheless compelling in part because the storyline she imposes on the past is one of great power especially for women.

Between 4400 and 2800 B.C.E., Gimbutas argues, the apparent oneness with nature and equality between genders was ruptured. She identifies three major waves of horse-mounted Kurgan invaders that conquered Old Europe and introduced hierarchical social relations and sun-god worship. Excavated graves from this period reveal male chiefs. They were buried with servants at their feet, and their graves contained weapons of human destruction and material possessions to indicate their high status. Sky gods rather than earth deities appear on pottery, suggesting a new worship of the heavens above rather than animate spirits within nature. This interpretation has likewise undergone scrutiny

because it attributes all disruption to external forces and seems to give far less credence to internal social changes and adaptations to external events.[40]

The feminist narrative continues with the overthrow of goddesses in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt and their replacement by male principles. Throughout the Mediterranean world, as a more settled way of life began, shifting settlements became towns, and civilizations with recorded histories arose. These cultures were rooted in the cyclical return of rains. Sumeria (Mesopotamia) blossomed in the fertile crescent between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. Sumerian gods were identified with nature: sky (An), earth (Ki), air (Enlil), and water (Enki). Domesticated animals, such as the bull and cow, symbolized fertility.[41]

An array of powerful female deities existed who were overthrown and replaced by male deities. In Mesopotamia, the Sumerian goddess Ishtar (Inanna) was portrayed with her much smaller son-lover, Tammuz. She renewed life each spring when she descended to the underworld to bring Tammuz back from the dead. Over time, however, Ishtar faded in importance to Tammuz. Another female deity was the life-giving Tiamat, who symbolized the earth. She was slain by her great great grandson, Marduk, who went on to create the heavens and the earth, heralding the rise of patriarchal society. Similarly, the male hero Gilgamesh (second millennium B.C.E.), who slew the forest god Humbaba, symbolized agriculture's encroachment on the ancient forests.[42]

In Egypt, Isis represented the maternal principle. She produced vegetation when impregnated by Osiris, her brother-husband. Every spring her tears overflowed to flood the Nile, which made the soil fertile. In one hand she carried a sistrum, or rattle, to awaken the powers of nature. In the other she held a bucket of Nile water, and her gown was decorated with stars and flowers to symbolize nature.[43] Osiris was the god of the people and bestowed gifts on humankind. He was killed by his brother Seth and restored to life by Isis, his sister-wife. Osiris, however, was a deity who descended from Atum-Re, the Sun God, and was associated with the Egyptian Sun Kings, or pharaohs, who embodied male power and virility.[44]

Feminists argue that a similar transition in the worship of goddesses to that of gods and a decline in the relative importance of female to male principles also occurred in ancient Greece. The Mycenaeans, who worshipped the goddess on the island of Crete at the Palace of Knossos about 1400 B.C.E., founded cities on mainland Greece, bringing with them worship of the mother goddess, which thrived from 1450 to 1100 B.C.E. Artemis, goddess of the hunt, was worshipped, as were the fertility goddesses Demeter and Persephone. The Achaean invasions of the thirteenth century B.C.E. began to weaken matrilineal traditions and by the close of the second millennium B.C.E., with the advent of the Dorians, patrilineal succession became established. The goddess Athene was reconfigured as a motherless female, free of maternal desire and labor pains, springing from the head of the male god Zeus. Here the male gives birth to the female, reversing the natural birth process. While the common people continued to worship Artemis, Demeter and Persephone, the ruling elite set up Olympian Gods, such as Zeus and Apollo as a patriarchal, rational idealized pantheon.[45]

Figure 2.5 Stone-age female figure with large buttocks and breasts, interpreted by some archeologists and feminists as representing the fertility of the earth and women. Neolithic Figure, Tel Chagar Bazar, Mesopotamia. Copyright the British Museum, London

The feminist narrative also reverses the biblical story. It begins with powerful female creative principles. It was the goddess Anat (Eve), mother of all the living, who created Yahweh. And, following the tradition in which goddesses gave birth to sons who then became their spouses, Eve created Adam, who then became her consort. Moreover, in feminist story, Adam was born of Eve's rib, not vice versa. The very idea that Adam should give birth to Eve (as Zeus similarly gave birth to Athena) reverses the biological process in which women give

birth to men. Notes Elizabeth Gould Davis, "[T]he whole intention of the distortion manifested in the Hebrew tale of Adam and Eve is twofold: first, to deny the tradition of a female creator; and second, to deny the original supremacy of the female sex."[46]

The feminist narrative likewise reveals important relationships between Eve and nature. Eve's mythological connections to the mother goddesses Tiamat, Inanna, Ishtar, Isis, and Demeter are reinforced by her associations with the garden, the serpent, and the tree, all of which were both nature and *of* nature. First, the Garden of Eden itself is nature. It was originally created by the mother goddess, and its loss represents the loss of intimacy between woman and nature. Second, the serpent, associated as divine counsel with the mother goddesses and female deities of Mesopotamia (Tiamat, Ishtar); Egypt (Hathor, Maat); Crete (the priestesses of Knossos); and Greece (Athena, Hera, Gaia) was the intimate link between Eve and a nature with which she communicated through speech. Third, the tree symbolized the fertility of nature and Eve's initial ingestion of its fruit initiated sexual consciousness. In the biblical expulsion story, Eve, the serpent, nature, and the body are all relegated, after the Fall, to the lowest levels of being. Merlin Stone sums up the consequences of these ancient associations between Eve and Nature: "[A] woman, listening to the advice of the serpent, eating the forbidden fruit, suggesting that men try it too and join her in sexual consciousness . . . caused the downfall and misery of all humankind."[47]

While many feminists have found evidence for a transition from matriarchy to patriarchy, other writers such as Riane Eisler see humanity as taking a five-thousand-year detour from a partnership society in prehistory to a dominator society that has existed throughout most of recorded history. She argues that today we have the possibility of reestablishing a partnership society in which men and women are linked as equals rather than ranked as dominant and submissive. Although feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether does not employ the term *partnership*, in *Gaia and God* she calls for a healing process that will reconfigure the positive features of Western culture and Christianity. She advocates a reordering of social relations that will promote justice in relationships between women and men and among races, classes, and nations. And in "Gender and the Problem of Prehistory," Ruether suggests that "the only way we can, as human, integrate ourselves into a life-sustaining relationship to nature, is for both of us, males as much as females, to see ourselves as equally rooted in the cycles of life and death, and equally responsible for creating ways of living sustainably together in that relationship."[48]

Comparing the narratives

The mainstream, environmentalist, and feminist Recovery Narratives all have strengths and weaknesses. The mainstream story of the Recovery of Eden through modern science, technology, and capitalism is perhaps the most powerful narrative in Western culture. It has been absorbed consciously and unconsciously by millions of people over several centuries. This story writ large

Figure 2.6 The Egyptian female deity, Isis, symbolized the fertility of nature as the Nile annually overflowed to produce crops. She rattles her sistrum to awaken the powers of nature and with her pail pours water onto the land. Isis, in Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegypticus* (1652). Courtesy of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

is one in which people participate as actors and which they incorporate into their daily lives. As a narrative it is both inspiring and realizable, providing a positive earthly goal and a promise of ultimate salvation. A vast treasury of first-rate scholarship exists on the origins and transmission of the Christian and modern stories and their impacts and implications for history and society.

Yet however comprehensive and positive as a narrative, the mainstream Recovery story is also an ideology of domination over nature and other people. In the following chapters, I will argue that, among other things, this narrative provides a justification for the takeover of New World lands and peoples and the management and transformation of forests, fields, and deserts. The Christian narrative is based on the belief and assumption that a monotheistic deity exists who has ordained a mode of behavior for humanity and designated roles for men and women. Such beliefs are based on acts of faith rather than credible evidence. Whatever positive ethics of care and stewardship arise from such beliefs, there exists an equal catalogue of war and violence against humanity and atrocities against the earth in the name of that deity. The deity can take on any attributes any group wishes to assign to it, and becomes a rationale for any actions a particular group wishes to take. As such, God (however defined and by whatever religion or sect) can be seen as a social construct that becomes a justification and an ideology for human behavior. The sacred texts that reveal such a deity can be viewed as humanly constructed stories arising out of specific social, historical, and environmental circumstances.

The environmentalist and feminist narratives likewise have strengths and weaknesses. They use climatological, archeological, anthropological, historical, and mythological evidence to support the storylines. The stories can be criticized, revised, or rejected on the basis of how they use, accept, and organize their evidence. To the extent that they deal with prehistory, their validity depends on how they interpret archeological, anthropological, and mythological evidence and the generalizability of that evidence.

Deciding how an early society behaved toward nature from surviving, nondecomposable artifacts is enormously difficult. Whether a *Magna Mater* or a variety of nature spirits or goddesses existed in prehistory is built on conjecture and extrapolation from later historical documents and anthropological observations. Whether mythologies recorded later in time actually reflect social realities or influence human behavior is problematical. Moreover, of the many statues and images that have survived, some are female, others are male, and still others are male/female or simply anthropomorphic. Some female images are buxom or pregnant with broad buttocks oriented toward the earth, while others are slender with outstretched arms reaching toward the sky, casting doubt on the universality of female fertility symbols. Other problems arise from the causes of transformation from a presumed egalitarian or matriarchal to a patriarchal society. External migrations such as warriors on horseback who infused sky gods into earth-centered egalitarian cultures or invasions of dominant outsiders places too much weight on external as opposed to internal processes, adaptations, and mutual influences. Such critiques undercut

the power of the overarching storyline of the environmental and feminist narratives.

Additional problems exist with respect to the very concept of narrative itself. A narrative, whether Christian, environmentalist, or feminist, is an ideal form into which particular bits of content are poured. The form is the organizing principle; the content is the matter. Like Plato's pure forms that explain the changing world of appearances, a narrative is a variant of idealism. What is real is the idea itself. In this sense, a Recovery Narrative is an idealist philosophy. To the extent to which people believe in or absorb the story, it organizes their behavior and hence their perception of the material world. The narrative thus entails an ethic and the ethic gives permission to act in a particular way toward nature and other people.

Narratives however are not deterministic. Their plots and ethical implications can be embraced or challenged. Naming the narrative gives people the power to change it, to move outside it, and to reconstruct it. People as material actors living in a real world can organize that world and their behaviors to bring about change and to break out of the confines a particular storyline.

Conclusion

My own view is that out of the global ecological crisis a new story or set of stories will emerge, but the new stories will arise out of new forms of production and reproduction as sustainable partnerships with nature are tested and become viable. Revisions of older spiritual traditions may help to create a new story, but spirituality alone cannot bring about a transformation. Nevertheless, probing the meanings of narrative, gender, and ethics embedded in the Bible and other historical narratives is critical for the planet's future. In Chapter 11, I propose a partnership ethic that may help to guide decision making and the construction of sustainable livelihoods in the twenty-first century.

Reinventing Eden

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