

One Nature Under God, and Divisible: Augustine’s “Duality of Man” Applied to the Creation Stories of Genesis

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“I want to know what’s happening, when it’s happening, why it’s happening . . . I believe in a wife who is the weaker vessel, leaning on her husband, who is supposed to be stronger. That’s just the way God made us . . . I want her to be her own person. It’s important that Sarah has an independent nature . . . with a submissive characteristic . . . The Bible says that wives are to be submissive to their husbands” (“What a Controlling Husband Says”). When he went on the Dr. Phil show in 2015, Jason, a pastor from North Carolina, did everything he could to justify his abusive behaviors based on scripture. While he paraphrases 1 Peter 3 and Ephesians 5 to make these several points about female submission in the Bible, it is his own editorial comment which is especially telling: “That’s just the way God made us.” Although many other passages support feminine submission, it all goes back to the beginning. How could any biblical scholar argue for equality of the sexes if God Himself created the female human inferior and submissive to the male?

The assumption that the female is inherently inferior based on the will of God has influenced religious practice and personal philosophy for millennia, from a modern television talk show to the earliest established

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commentary on the creation stories in Genesis, the Talmud. In one section of morning prayers for the Jewish observance of the Sabbath, in the same group where they bless God that they are not “a heathen, a slave, or an animal,” the men recite, “Blessed are you, Lord, our God, ruler of the universe who has not created me a woman” (Sacks). Other traditional Jewish practices, such as the halakha of *yichud*, further exemplify a belief in feminine inferiority. In this practice, a man is forbidden to be alone with a woman or even two women, but a woman may be alone with two men because women are considered to be weaker and more susceptible to evil and therefore while two women are not capable of asserting enough influence on each other to prevent misconduct, two men are capable (*Babylonian Talmud*, Rashi 80b). In a religion based on adherence to divine law, it is hard to more glaringly assert the inferiority of women than to imply that they are innately the more sinful sex.

The idea that women are weaker than men based on the nature of their creation has traveled up the Abrahamic stream to Christianity throughout the ages, creating a religious justification for abuse time and time again. If a woman is weaker and inferior, like a slave or a horse, she must be less human than man and so can be treated as such. Many have spoken out against this interpretation of scripture. Jimmy Carter, former President of the United States, in an address to the Parliament of the World’s Religions, stated that “the belief that women are inferior human beings in the eyes of God gives excuses to the brutal husband who beats his wife, the soldier who rapes a woman, the employer who has a lower pay scale for women employees, or parents who decide to abort a female embryo” (Carter). While many have taken issue with the idea that women are created inferior, until it can be theologically established that this is not the case, these ideas will continue to prevail.

The moment of gender’s creation presents a crossroads wherein the biblical scholar may powerfully either affirm or deny the social and spiritual equality of women and men.¹ It is necessary to examine this moment in the book of Genesis, where it appears both in the first and second creation narrative. In analyzing and comparing these passages, we can discover whether or not the Bible, a book to which billions of people attribute the foundation of their morality, actually inspires such a dangerous interpretation. This paper will argue that human beings, as defined in Genesis, have

¹ This paper does not preclude the possibility of genders other than male and female, nor does it definitively conflate gender and sex. Because the context of the passage seems to lack this distinction, I will assume for the sake of argument that the language of the Bible means to put forth two discrete beings, distinguished as male and female both physically and spiritually.

two innate orders, after the theology of Augustine. One is spiritual, pertaining to man's relationship with the divine, and the other is natural, pertaining to man's relationship with others and with the world. My analysis will show the former to be both more significant theologically and more favorable toward gender equality. To prove the relevance of Augustine's two orders in regards to the problem of gender identity in religion, I will first establish that the idea of these two orders exist in both Jewish and Christian writings. Then, I will analyze the distinct role each order plays in human nature, before finally discussing the implications of this idea in the analysis of modern social practice to strip men like Jason of one of the most powerful weapons that they use against women today: the notion that women were made by God to be lesser.

I. Two Orders of Being

This exegesis begins with Augustine's two orders, written for his fifth century audience. He observes that the apostles handed down salutary rules as to "how Christians ought to live together with regard to differences of people (Jews and Greeks), status (masters and slaves), sex (husbands and wives), and the like" (Augustine, *Ancient Christian Commentary* 42). Augustine goes on to discuss these distinctions as secularisms: he sees them as societal expectations, not divisions under God. In fact, these exact pairs are listed in the third chapter of Galatians for the purpose of dismantling them through the power of Christ Jesus (43). Augustine categorizes them as worldly, alluding to Matthew 22 and Mark 12 when he distinguishes the aspects of human life that people "discern the things they enumerate" from the spiritual life, characterizing the former as "the tribute to Caesar" that was paid by Jesus' crucifixion (Mt. 22:15-22 and Mk. 12:13-17 in Augustine, *Confessions*). Augustine's implication is that these divisions are not of God, but of Caesar, here representative of human society as a whole.

Religious historian Christopher Roberts focuses on the third and last of Augustine's divisions, the division of the sexes. He notes that, based on the work of Augustine, "sexual differences are apparently overcome in social life from an eschatological perspective, but, like Caesar, they persist for the time being and merit respect as part of a legitimate sexual order" (Roberts 44-45) Though men and women are later characterized as all one in Christ, Augustine's interpretation seems to Roberts to indicate that distinct sexual roles have their place in religious society. The key is that they persist only for the time being: it will be significant to this paper that divided sexual roles are not eternal because they are not of God but instead of "Caesar" and by extension society. Professor Gerald Bonner

further extends this point in his analysis of Augustine's attitude towards women, saying that "in things spiritual, considered as *homo*, she [woman] is man's equal; in the natural order, considered as *femina*, she is inferior to him" and that "secular conventions must receive their due" (Bonner 70).

Roberts and Bonner both present a version of the two orders introduced at the start of this paper, that according to Augustine there are two distinct human identities. The first is spiritual. It is something divine and eternal that does not draw any distinction between men and women. In this spiritual order, a man and a woman is a spirit created by God. They are both one in God's creation and salvation. The second order is the natural order, which has to do with the dirty, secular nature of human life on earth. Although governmental and social structures are often antithetical to the general perception of Godliness, Augustine still considers them to be necessary. This second order, which distinguishes between the societal roles of the man and those of the woman, is neither eternal nor divine, but should nevertheless receive its due consideration. This opinion hearkens back to Paul in Romans 13 when he says, "let everyone be subject to the governing authorities" (Rom. 13:1), or to Peter's edict to "submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution" (1 Pt. 2:13).

Augustine's two orders correspond with the two distinct creation stories of Genesis. In the first, humankind is defined explicitly in terms of its relationship to God. Because "God created man in His own image" and "made him in His own likeness," man first and foremost resembles something divine and eternal (Gen. 1:27). For the author of Genesis, there is some critical correspondence and likeness between this first account of man's nature and between God, the perpetual. This link is further explained by the command immediately following it to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28). For mortal beings, permanence is achieved through the process of reproduction, so the first version of Adam is twice paired with immortality. He is created by God's eternal word, in His likeness, and then immediately granted perpetuity through the commandment to reproduce.

Phyllis Bird of the Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary theorizes that this commandment must be the reason for the "male and female" specification (Gen. 1:27); it must go along with the primary theme of eternity and cyclical reproduction in the first creation story. She says, "Genesis 1 invites, and demands, renewed reflection on the meaning of sexual differentiation as a constitutive mark of our humanity and the meaning of Godlikeness as the defining attribute of humankind" (Bird 19). This perspective is not the only analysis of the in the first creation narrative, but the rest seem to reach the same conclusion as Bird, namely that the first creation story focuses on man as created in the image of

God, thereby having some divine nature in him. A specification between genders is certainly made within the first creation story; however, man is not initially created in two distinct factions of man and woman. The species *adam* is understood, rather, as collective, as evident in the referral of the name to the plural object (wayyiqra' 'et-šêmam 'adam: "and he called *their* name *adam*") (15), and thus the distinction between genders in the first creation story is made only for the purpose of highlighting our ability to reproduce and perpetuate ourselves into eternity.

The second creation story, like the first, contains no explicit statement of dominance or submission between the sexes. Its description focuses more on the relationship between male humans and female humans than on the relationship between mankind and God, as the first does. It complements the first by focusing on the "psycho-social meaning of sexuality and its historical manifestations" (8). Less conceptual, less spiritual, and less immediately in touch with God as a protagonist, the second creation story focuses more on secular community in the forms of companionship, the sharing of work, and human attraction. All of these characteristics seem to be especially human aspects of Adam and Eve, which contrasts with mankind's spiritual character in the first creation story. Sexual differentiation, seen in the second narrative in both the creation of physical bodies in different ways and in the assignment of different roles, acts as the precondition of mortal human community.

Adam and Eve become the foundation of an essentially flawed lineage of people, the origin of which is this second story wherein they are created physically and banished due to their own sin. This tragic conclusion to humanity's first chapter depicts some of the negative aspects of mortal community: exploitation and deceit. In a final act of disconnection between the genders, even between those two humans made from the same flesh, God tells Adam that he shall rule over Eve. What leads up to this unfortunate final act is a creation narrative that focuses on the temporary, secular, and communal aspects of creation. For, this second creation is the creation of physical bodies and roles for Adam and Eve as distinct characters, to form human relationships, not divine ones. Since all human relationships are temporary, as opposed to the eternal relationship between God and spirit seen in the first creation story, which is marked by the procreation edict, this created community is a counterpart to the isolated creation of mankind in the first account. In the first account, God's eternal nature is matched by His command that Adam and Eve multiply: the eternal aspect of mortality. In the second, God's eternal nature is rather contrasted with the sinful and temporary character of humanity.

II. *Two Beings, Created*

The first creation story pairs well with Augustine's spiritual order, and the second with the natural order of humanity. Where the first story focuses on humanity's relationship with God, having been created by Him and in His image, the second focuses on humanity's internal, mortal relationships. The first provides a spiritual account devoid of any sin or imperfection but only categorized as good and associated with human perpetuity. The second is a carnal account that begins in the "dust of the earth" and ends with the fall of humanity into sin (Gen. 2:15–3:24). These two narratives have been analyzed thoroughly by Jewish and Christian authorities whose texts reveal similar interpretations.

Rabbinic commentators tend to agree that there is, between the first and second narrative, a key distinction involving spirituality and corporality. According to Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno of the 1500s, "when Genesis refers to mankind as being created in God's own image, using the Hebrew word *elokim* [sic] as an adjective, it refers to creatures who are spiritual in their essence...Such beings are devoid of physical matter, and are totally disembodied. This is what makes them basically infinite" (Sforno). This commentary demonstrates that there is some precedent within Judaism for the interpretation that the first creation story refers to spiritual beings as opposed to physical ones. This view matches the Augustinian perspective that the first creation story describes a spiritual order, one of two distinct human inclinations. Rabbi David Kimhi would have supported this point had he lived to see it written. He wrote that "the first creation story refers only to a man's soul, as indicated by the word *b'tzalmo* (in God's image). The Torah wanted to draw a line of distinction between the construction of man's body and that of his soul" (Kimhi 602). He goes on to note that the process by which man's body is created involves the dust of the earth, a physical entity that could not be relevant to the construction of a thing as abstract as the soul. These two interpretations of the first creation story both support the idea that humanity was made with two distinct natures and that the first account of this event refers specifically to that nature that relates to God and the divine.

This interpretation is not limited to Jewish commentary. Augustine elaborates on his theory about the separation of body and soul, expressing that the soul is made at some point in the first creation story out of the truth and wisdom of God and is then united with the physical body, that secondary natural order, in the second creation story. Other early Christian authorities, specifically early doctors of the Catholic Church such as Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom, also uphold this idea as a valid interpretation of Genesis. Chrysostom is recorded to have said, "it

was pleasing to God's love of humanity to make this thing created out of earth a participant of the rational nature of the soul, through which this living creature was manifest as excellent and perfect" (Chrysostom, *Ancient Christian Commentary* 28). In this comment, Chrysostom interprets the relationship between the two creation accounts, one perceived as focusing on the soul and the other on the fragile and inherently sinful body, made excellent by the addition of the divine. Chrysostom's soul and body correspond with Augustine's two orders of humanity. The soul, created inherently divine and as one with God, fits with Augustine's spiritual order, while Chrysostom's estimation of the body, fragile and imperfect, is similar to the natural order.

Gregory of Nyssa was prolific on this particular issue. He strongly believed that in the first creation story "the divine image transcends sexual difference" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Ancient Christian Commentary* 29) Though the species *adam* is articulated as male and female, mankind is first created in one divine spirit and then again in two distinct gendered forms. Gregory emphasizes this point, saying, "the creation of our nature must in some way have been double; that which renders us like God and that which establishes the division of the sexes" (31). In his commentary on the creation stories, he identifies a compound nature of man, by which there exists a divine, rational, and intelligent element which does not admit the distinction of male and female, and also an irrational, brutish element pertaining to our bodily form and structure that divides us by gender (30). He relates this second aspect of man explicitly to the second account of creation, wherein is implanted in mankind an "animal and irrational" mode that pertains to our relationships with one another (23). Each of these early Christian interpretations supports or extends Augustine's theory about man's two distinct natures, one spiritual and one natural.

In Jewish interpretations of scripture, this natural order is often coupled with the idea of sin: what makes man fragile and mortal is often what leads him away from the will of God. According to the Talmud, for example, by the time the fall of man occurred in the second creation narrative, "sin had become a fact, and the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) had gained the mastery over mankind" (Neusner 32a). Sin is linked to the human nature of the second creation story in the Jewish distinction between the animal soul (*nefesh habehamit*) and the divine soul (*nefesh elokit*) (Shneur Zalman of Liadi). The animal soul, as described by Jewish and Christian scholars alike, is that which desires worldly, physical pleasures and pertains to the physical body rather than the spirit. This distinction is what has been related repeatedly to the second creation story, where it is recorded that God gave Adam and Eve physical bodies and then they fell into sin. The *nefesh elokit*, in contrast, is a spark of the divine, that which

biblical scholars seem to associate with the first creation story. It is “part of the One above,” as termed by Job, and has domain over faith, will, intellect, and emotion (Job 32:9). The *nefesh elokit* yearns to know God and all things spiritual. The Jewish prayer involving these two identities, the divine soul and the animal soul, is a prayer for a Godly soul, and describes the *nefesh elokit*, the Godly soul, as having once been pure and one with God before being blown into a mortal body (Kremnizer).

The animal soul is intrinsically linked to the baser instincts, actions, and structures of human life. To connect it to *mitzvot*, laws of the Jewish religion, conjures images of forbidden incestuous sexual relationships, purity surrounding bodily functions, and ritual within man-made temples. The *Arayot* (laws prohibiting certain sexual relationships), the Mishnaic Orders of *Taharot* (purity laws), and *Kodshim* (laws of holy things) are sets of law that pertain to the animal aspect of humanity. These deal with what is temporary and earthly in the law, as opposed to eternal and holy. By contrast, there are some laws that pertain instead to a Jew’s relationship with God. It is a *mitzvah* to know that God exists, and to hallow His name and to love Him and fear Him. These are commandments that govern the divine soul. The primary difference between these different sets of law is that laws which can dissolve based on circumstance cannot pertain to the eternal soul. There are many laws, most pertaining to actions involving the now destroyed temple, that are simply not applicable in modern-day Judaism. Animal sacrifice cannot take place because it was commanded that it take place in a temple that no longer exists. The same could be said of *Taharot*, which explicate the rituals needed to be clean in the Temple. Similarly, the *Arayot* and other laws like them may not apply to every individual, based on their specific life circumstances. For example, if a man does not have a sister, it is impossible for him to commit incest with his sister. Every commandment based on the animal essence of humanity may be applicable to an individual based only on changeable circumstance, while every law based on the divine soul is categorically applicable to everyone for all time. The latter laws pertain to the spirit, or Augustine’s spiritual order, while the former pertain to the body, or the natural order, and protect against some specific sin that can be committed by the body.

In the New Testament, sin and law are also strongly associated with the natural order, though it is never referred to by that name specifically. The sin of Christian ideology entered into the world through one man, Adam, and death entered into the world by that one man’s sin. Therefore, sin goes hand in hand with mortality, a force which defines the natural order. The second creation story expresses both the moral imperfections and also the mortal and fragile nature of the body. Concerning sin after Adam’s, Paul’s epistles seem to indicate that Adam’s sin stood down or

constituted “sinners” (*katestathésan*) in general (Williams 4). Paul makes his own reference to the duality of human nature by often contrasting the term “flesh” (*sarx*) with the term for “spirit” (*pneuma*) (9). Some biblical scholars interpret flesh to mean “mere human nature, the earthly nature of man apart from Divine influence and therefore prone to sin and opposed to God” (Thayer and Strong 591). Paul regards this estimation of human flesh, identical to Augustine’s natural order, as the seat of the sin principle. “In me,” he says, “that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing” (Rom. 7:18). Paul never denies the free will of human beings, but he regards the lower nature of man, the natural order according to Augustine, as the element of weakness and corruption in man that grows sin in its soil. This principle of sin drags Paul’s higher man, a concept developed further by Augustine’s spiritual order, down into the realm of flesh and, through passions, appetites, and the like, prompts man to sin (Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:3).

Just as in the laws of the Old Testament, where the commandments governing the natural order of humanity pertain specifically to worldly circumstance, sin is temporary in the added text of the New Testament. Sin, according to Romans 5, was conquered by Jesus. The basest instinct under the natural order was vanquished by the epitome of the spiritual one (Rom. 5:12). Jesus is considered the paragon of the spiritual order by Christian theologians such as Marius Victorinus, who observed that “Christ is the image after which the spiritual aspect of man was created” (Victorinus, *Ancient Christian Commentary* 48). He reaches this conclusion because he interprets that first account of creation, where God says, “let us make” in the first-person plural (Gen. 1:26), as being a conversation between the Father and the Son, one speaking to a co-operator. Accordingly, Jesus epitomizes the spiritual order of man, which is eternal, and conquers the natural one, by which it is apparent not only that the natural order is temporary but also that it should be.

Completely opposite from the temporary, natural order of man is man’s primary characteristic, his role as the being made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26). According to Victorinus, man does not embody the image of God but exists “according to the image,” since Jesus alone is the image of God (Victorinus, *Ancient Christian Commentary* 48). Man is the image of Jesus, who is the sole personification of divinity and thus the height of what Augustine would have labeled man’s spiritual order. Man thus reflects the eternal, spiritual order in his countenance, despite the fact that he also partakes in the temporary, natural order of sin and death. This theme of the mortal nature of sin contrasted with the perpetuity of the divine is reflected throughout the New Testament. 1 Peter states that “all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures

forever” (1 Pt. 1:24–25). 2 Corinthians proclaims that “we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Cor. 5:1). Jesus himself relates this sentiment in the Gospels, when He tells His followers not to “store up for [themselves] treasures on earth, where moth and decay destroy, and thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor decay destroys, nor thieves break in and steal” (Mt. 6:19–21). These passages instruct that worldly things are easily corrupted and inherently temporary, while what is divine can never falter.

III. *Two Creations, Compared*

The connection between the natural order and sin is critical for understanding the equality or inequality of the genders as assigned by God at creation. God makes the first law in the second creation story, when Adam and Eve are commanded not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The second creation narrative is the one involving their corporeal forms and where they are given the first opportunity to sin. This law is in the same vein as those Jewish laws that cannot be practiced in certain circumstances and could not apply if not for the tree or its fruit. The second creation story reflects the categorization of worldly matters, including the laws that apply to humanity’s earthly interactions, as temporary and circumstantial categorization. By contrast, the soul’s relationship with God is divine and eternal, which the first creation narrative expresses.

This conflict between the temporary, circumstantial role of that which pertains to the natural order and the perpetuity of the spiritual order has great implications for a biblical understanding of gender relations. Jewish and Christian biblical scholarship broadly agree that male and female are explicitly equal in the first creation story and in mankind’s spiritual order. Woman is considered *homo* along with man in the first creation story according to modern Christian scholars like Bonner and Roberts, Gregory of Nyssa tells us that the divine image transcends sexual difference, and Augustine’s and Chrysostom’s estimation of the human soul appraises male and female as equal in the eyes of God. Jewish scholars concur, observing that the infinite and spiritual beings described in the first creation story are not distinguished by their sexual bodies, but are completely one and equal. According to one Midrashic explanation, Adam was even created at first with two faces and only afterwards, in the second creation story, was Adam divided into two beings (Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*). The nature of the first, spiritual order is one of utter equality between men and women.

The natural order, described in the second creation story, is that which divides man and woman by gender.

The connection between the temporary, circumstantial character of the natural order and its assignment of gender roles in the second creation story is crucial. In the same way that some natural order commandments no longer apply due to changes in worldly circumstance, the gender hierarchy set forth in the second creation story may also no longer apply due to changes in society. From both Jewish and Christian standpoints, sexual equality is eternally binding, while the power relationship introduced in the second creation story is mandatory only insofar as social circumstance makes it appropriate. Some contemporary scholars might argue that our current social climate is such that unbalanced gender dynamics are proper. Others might say that while the patriarchal ways of biblical times might have provided some precedent for this kind of unevenness, it makes no sense at the present. If the second is true, society should default to the eternally relevant first nature, and in any case biblical inequality between men and women is animalistic rather than divine. It should be counted among those inferior principles that can be followed or rightfully disregarded based on societal circumstance. With this understanding, the Christian philosopher can finally understand how gender inequality belongs under the category of what is due unto Caesar and, as previously established, what was dealt with by the crucifixion. What is left is the spiritual aspect of humanity, which is due unto God.

IV. Conclusion

The biblical foundations of gender inequality are not only circumstantial, but theologically inferior to those of gender equality. The first creation story in Genesis, that which establishes spiritual equality between man and woman, takes eternal precedence over the second, which implies the disparity in roles and power dynamics found so often in the language of modern men looking to abuse women with biblical justification. Augustine's idea of two human orders has its foundation in the first few chapters of Genesis and it clarifies the primacy of the first across Jewish and Christian scholarship alike. For thousands of years, women have been viewed as less than men based on the creation stories of Genesis, but by analyzing prominent biblical scholarship of these two stories, this paper has argued that this position is not one justified by reasonable biblical analysis; men like Jason cannot factually account for their deplorable actions using biblical exegesis and must resort to reinventing the narrative.

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