D. Moyer

J. Oosten

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DAVID S. MOYER and JARICH G. OOSTEN

THE AMBIVALENT GARDENER: THE ANIMAL AND VEGETABLE CODES OF GENESIS 2:4 to 9:29

The third day was a busy day. God separated the waters from the earth, named them, and liked what He saw. Then He created "plants yielding seed and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed" and liked what He saw. The sixth day was also a busy day, for on that day God created the beasts of the earth and man. And this time "God saw everything that He had made and behold, it was very good". The image that one receives from this priestly hymn of the first chapter of Genesis is of a benevolent creator who has created an orderly universe and is pleased with the results. However, Biblical scholarship indicates that this elegantly structured story is a fairly late composition (possibly after the Exile) and was probably compiled by a priestly group.

In the myth cycle of Genesis 2:4 to 9:29 one has, for the most part, a distinctly older source: the so-called J source. J refers to the word used for God, i.e. Yahweh or Jehovah. Indeed, this God almost seems to be a different person from the God of Genesis 1. He is some-

DAVID S. MOYER obtained an M.A. from Harvard University and a Ph.D. from the University of Leiden. He is currently Assistant Professor at the University of Victoria, Canada. His principal interests are structural anthropology, Indonesia, and the Canadian Arctic. Two previous publications by Dr. Moyer are: *The Logic of the Laws*, VKI Vol. 75, 1975, and 'The Ideology of Social Reform in a Nineteenth Century South Sumatran Legal Code', *Anthropologica*, N.S. Vol. XX 1-2, 1978. He may be reached at the Department of Anthropology, University of Victoria, Victoria, B.C. V8W 2Y2, Canada.

JARICH G. OOSTEN obtained his Ph.D. in the anthropology of religion from the University of Groningen. He is at present Associate Professor at the Institute of Cultural and Social Studies, University of Leiden. His main interests are cognitive anthropology, the structural study of myth, and the anthropology of the Inuit. Dr. Oosten has published *The Theoretical Structure of the Religion of the Netsilik and Iglulik*, Meppel 1976, and *Religieuze verandering in de wereldgodsdiensten*, Leiden 1978. He may be contacted at the Institute of Cultural and Social Studies, University of Leiden, Stationsplein 10, Leiden, Netherlands.

what capricious, does not always like what He has created, and seems to have trouble establishing the desired order among the things that He has created. The process by which this "correct" order is finally established is a fascinating and complex one and can be analysed at a variety of levels and through a variety of codes. One of the more interesting of these codes is the animal and vegetable one in which one can trace the development of the ordering relations between man and the ultimately edible plants and animals.

The first myth in this creation cycle is the story of Adam and Eve (or more properly that of Adam and Woman, because she was not called Eve until the expulsion). In this creation story the initial status quo was a dry earth, infertile because "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" (Gen. 2 : 5). "But a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground" (Gen. 2 : 6). And then He created man from the earth. Having done this He planted a garden in Eden. "And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food" (Gen. 2 : 9). Here we find the first essential element in the vegetable code, for it is quite clear that the only vegetable matter in the Garden of Eden were trees bearing fruit. And looking back for the moment to Genesis 1 we see that the "plants yielding seed" are carefully differentiated from "fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed" (cf. Gen. 1 : 11 and 1 : 29). Furthermore, we are told of two special trees, i.e. the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

Then God put man in the garden. But what man was supposed to do in the garden is somewhat problematical. The English translation of the Revised Standard Version is vague. Man was put in the "Garden of Eden to till it and to keep it" (Gen. 2 : 15). The Hebrew text is "lé ovda ulé shomra". *Ovda* means to work something and *shomra*, a feminine form, means that the thing worked and watched was neither the garden nor the trees, both of which are masculine. The reference is probably to the land itself, which is feminine in gender.

If it is not entirely clear what the man was supposed to do in the garden it is very clear what he was not to do. For at this point one finds what is to the best of our knowledge the only explicit prohibition on the eating of vegetable matter in the Old Testament. "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall die" (Gen. 2 : 16-17). Significantly, at this point no mention is made of the tree of life.

Then God said, "It is not good that man should be alone; I will make a fit helper for him" (Gen. 2 : 18). "So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air" (Gen. 2 : 19). Man's primary and indeed, insofar as we can tell, only function with regard to these creatures was their naming. Then another helper was created for man out of his own body and He called her Woman. At this point we are able to perceive the first ordering relation of God's creations. They all are directly or indirectly related to the soil or ground. The trees, we are told in Genesis 2 : 9, were made to grow out of the ground ("And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree . . ."). This is different from man, who was literally created out of the soil. The word used is actually the same word used to describe the action of a potter working moist clay. And the beasts of the earth were created in the same way as man, i.e. out of the soil. Woman, on the other hand, is once removed, so to speak, from the soil, because she was created out of Adam who was created out of the soil. Thus Adam, in one sense, is closer to animals than he is to plants, and in another, closer to Woman than he is to the animals. In the priestly hymn of Genesis 1 this difference is formalized by indicating that the vegetable order was created on the third day while the beasts, man, and woman, were created on the sixth day. It is worth noting that the hymn of Genesis 1 adds a further differentiation indicating that birds and fish were created on the fifth day. However, in Genesis 2, the birds and beasts are both equidistant from man.

Having established this status quo, the story proceeds to the first major alteration of this order, i.e. the story of The Fall. However, we will not proceed to analyse this in the present context, largely for methodological reasons, because we want to focus on the edible vegetable and animal codes. One point is significant however: Adam and Woman clothe themselves with *tree* leaves. We pick up the story again at the three speeches that God addressed to the three parties to the fruit-eating incident. Significantly, the most interesting of these speeches is the one addressed to Adam who, as one recalls, was put in the garden to look after and work the land.

Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you shall return. (Gen. 3 : 17-19).

In this statement one finds two primary transformations. The first in the vegetable dimension redefines what man is to eat. From eating the natural food of the fruit-bearing trees man comes to live by the plants of the field (i.e. grains), which must be culturally worked (i.e. made into bread) in order to be eaten.¹ In terms of the nature/culture opposition, natural man has become cultural man. The second and indeed more complex transformation deals with man's altered relation to the soil. First, with regard to the trees which God made to grow out of the soil, now *man* must toil and work the soil to make field plants grow out of the soil. But now the soil is cursed because of man, thus suggesting that the distance between man and the soil has increased. On the other hand, man must ultimately be reunited with the soil at his death. Thus the stable relation between man and the soil in the Garden of Eden is now changed to a dynamic one in which man is alien to or distant from the soil in his lifetime but, upon death, is reunited with it. The fact of certain death is established by a permanent and lasting vegetable prohibition. Man is to be driven from the garden to prevent him from eating of the tree of life; otherwise, as the text says (Gen. 3 : 22), he might become too much like God.

With regard to man's future relations to the animals we are not told anything explicit. However, in Genesis 3 : 20 and 3 : 21 we find two statements more or less relating to animals. First, Woman is to be renamed Eve (recalling Adam's function of naming other beings in the garden). Secondly, God gives Man and his wife *skin* garments with which to clothe themselves. Thus God has replaced the fig leaf garments that Adam and Woman made for themselves with animal skin garments. In some respects this parallels the fruit to grain to bread (and implicitly nature/culture) transformations in that the animal must die (as the grain must die in the process of being harvested) and then be culturally worked before it can be used by man.

Therefore one finds the life/death opposition introduced both with regard to man and with regard to plants and animals. Man himself must die and return to the soil. Plants must die in order to provide sustenance for man, i.e. the grain must be harvested. Furthermore, man himself has the right to kill the plants. With regard to the animals the situation is less clear. Though it is clear that animals had to die in order to provide clothing for man, the manner of the animals' death is uncertain. God *may* have killed the animals, God *may* have shed the animals' blood. However, what is certain is that man has not been given the right to shed an animal's blood.

In the second myth of the cycle one finds two important themes with regard to the vegetable and animal codes. One involves the strongest opposition between vegetable and animal codes. The other involves a complete and orderly destruction of all of God's creations by man. With regard to the quality of the opposition between vegetable and agricultural material, Cain, the elder son of Adam and Eve, was the Tiller of the Soil, while his younger brother, Abel, was the Keeper of Sheep. This relative age priority of vegetable and animal categories repeats that of the previous myth of the cycle in which trees were created before animals. Similarly one finds the same time relation in Genesis 1, where vegetable material was created on the third day, while animal material was created on the fifth and sixth days.

With regard to the systematic destruction (or killing) of God's creations by man, it seems best to proceed with the analysis in two steps: first, examine the sequence of events; and second, examine the structural links between the steps of the sequence. First, we are told that "In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions" (Gen. 4 : 3-4). If one accepts the ordering of this statement as relevant we see that first Cain has killed plants and Abel has killed animals. The mention of "fat portions" leaves no doubt that the animals have been killed. The next killing involves Cain's killing of his brother. The sequence of these killings follows the order of creation, i.e. vegetable, animal (beasts) and animal (man). Finally, because Cain has spilled Abel's blood on the soil, the land becomes infertile for him. This last point is an inversion of the original creation, in which moisture went up from the soil and watered the earth and made the plants grow, in that blood descends and pollutes the soil. Thus we have a systematic killing of the elements of creation ending in the infertility of the soil, which was the original source of all created things.

In the structural relations between the steps of the sequence one finds a number of oppositions. First, Cain's offering of plants is rejected while Abel's offering of animals is accepted. However, one must recall the situation at the end of the first myth of the cycle, where it is made clear that while man has been given the right to kill plants he has not been given the right to kill animals. Thus Abel's offering is appropriate in one sense (it is an animal) but inappropriate in another sense (it involved killing an animal). Then we find that Abel is killed but his brother is allowed to live. There is the suggestion here that the shedding of Abel's blood is a retribution for the shedding of animal blood. If

this hypothesis is correct, there is an implied equivalence between human and animal blood.

Finally, like the conclusion of the previous myth in the cycle, this myth deals with the altered relation between man and the soil. This changed relationship is a direct result of the fact that Cain killed his brother in a field or, to be more precise, because he shed his brother's blood in a field. And as God said, "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground it shall no longer yield to you its strength" (Gen. 4 : 10-12). This carries the sequence begun with Adam one step further. Adam also faced a situation in which "cursed is the ground because of you". But by toil, Adam could gain sustenance, whereas for Cain even this possibility is removed. And furthermore, the text makes clear that the relationship is permanent, for none of the three occupations mentioned among Cain's descendants involves agriculture. Thus, with Cain, man's living relationship with the soil becomes minimal (or his distance from the soil becomes maximal), i.e. he can gain nothing from it. So, at the end of the second myth of the cycle, the proper ordering of the animal/vegetable/man/God relation remains unresolved. Man no longer has the right or possibility of gaining sustenance from plants, and his first attempt at sacrifice has resulted not only in the death of the animal but also in the death of the sacrificer.

In the final myth of the cycle, the problem is finally resolved by drastic measures — a massively destructive flood. In this case, however, in direct contrast to the previous myth where man destroyed the elements of creation, God is the destroyer. The essential portion of the myth begins with the observation that "God saw the earth, and behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Gen. 6 : 12). And therefore He decided "to make an end to all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Gen. 6 : 13). Once again we are faced with the animal/vegetable opposition. The flood was to destroy all but selected animals (and men) but no mention is made of preserving plants and trees from the flood. However, what we do know is that vegetable material appears immediately after the flood. The question is, did it survive the flood or did it regrow, thereby repeating creation?

In the ark that Noah built, seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean animals were to be preserved. This is the Yahwist tradition; in the priestly version only one pair of everything was

preserved. Additionally, Noah, his three sons and all of their wives were saved. It is worth noting that the J source version preserves a numerical symmetry of 7 clean/1 unclean between the animals and man because, although there are eight people, one of them (Ham) turns out to be a miscreant of the first order. Thus by the waters of the heavens and the fountains of the deep, the earth is flooded destroying the corrupt flesh. But perhaps even more significant is that the purification of the earth by the destruction of flesh takes place without the shedding of blood. Here we have a transformation of the original creation in that water is now destructive instead of creative, and also a transformation of the Cain and Abel story in which blood was not destructive but defiling.

The first bird to be sent from the ark after the waters had receded was a raven — a predator, a carrion eater, and in all probability an unclean bird (cf. Lev. 11 : 15). The second bird sent out is a dove which, on its second flight, returns with an olive branch, i.e. a branch from a fruit-bearing tree, not a field plant or grain. The point of the story seems to be that the vegetable world (or at least the trees) is established on the earth before the animals and man return to the earth.

The next significant portion of the myth relates to Noah's sacrifices and God's reactions. Noah makes a burnt offering from every clean animal and bird. The Lord smelled the pleasant odour and made three important statements: first, "I will never again curse the ground because of man" (Gen. 8 : 21), thus finally ordering or accepting the ordering of the man/soil relation that had begun before the creation of the Garden of Eden; secondly, "neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done before" (Gen. 8 : 21), thus finally accepting the presence of man and beasts on the soil; and thirdly, "while the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen. 8 : 22). In other words, the agricultural cycle is established. These three statements taken together provide for the ordering of the universe, i.e. man's right to use the soil, a freedom from destruction for man and the animals, and an ordered agricultural cycle. This is the end of Chapter 8.

In Chapter 9 the details are spelled out more completely. "Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and as I gave you the green plants I give you everything" (Gen. 9 : 3). Thus man finally has the explicit right to use and eat *both* plants and animals. However, there is one explicit food restriction. "Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood" (Gen. 9 : 4). With this restriction, the first

animal-eating taboo, one finds a parallel with the only lasting vegetable prohibition, i.e. the taboo on eating from the vegetable tree of life.

Furthermore, there is the final prohibition that "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed" (Gen. 9 : 6). This finally resolves the problems posed in the Cain and Abel myth: blood revenge is not only permitted but demanded, and the blood of animals is completely distinguished from the blood of man.

There then follows a slightly modified restatement of some of these rules, in which a covenant between man and God is established in which the rainbow is given as sign of the covenant. This story need not concern us here because, once again, we are dealing with the priestly tradition.

Thus, taking the story from the Garden of Eden to the immediate results of Noah's accepted sacrifice, one can trace a series of transformations. In the Garden of Eden story we have the natural fruit-eater transformed into the knowing cultural bread (grain) eater. In the garden the animals were only company for man. In the story of Cain and Abel we find the direct opposition of a cultural grain grower and a cultural animal keeper ending in death and failure. In Noah's person we find the opposition resolved for Noah saves the animals in his ark, sacrifices them to the Lord, and earns the right to eat them with one restriction. And we are also told that Noah was a tiller of the soil. Indeed, in the somewhat free translation of the Revised Standard Version, we are told that he was the first tiller of the soil (Gen. 9 : 20).

But perhaps more significantly we are told of Noah's agricultural activities at the beginning of the final part of the cycle. For, "He planted a vineyard and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside" (Gen. 9 : 20-22). As a result, Noah said "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (Gen. 9 : 25). On the other hand, Shem is to be Lord of Canaan and Noah's other son the guest of Shem. The results of the Sin of Ham establish an almost political myth of legitimization of the sociological order.

However, the sin itself is a remarkable transformation of the Garden of Eden story. The nakedness seen by Ham is obviously his father's genitals. Thus, instead of a symmetrical and complementary perception of nakedness between man and woman, we have the asymmetrical perception of the son of the father (male/male) (older/younger). But the

consequences are surprisingly similar. Further, the cause of this perception is transformed from the eating of natural fruit of the tree of knowledge in one case, to the culturally worked fruit of the vine (i.e. wine) in the other. Moreover, the eater of the culturally transformed fruit is unaware of his nakedness while the non-eater perceives the nakedness. In the Garden of Eden, on the other hand, both eaters are conscious of their own nakedness and perceive each other's nakedness.

Thus, not only does the story of the Sin of Ham represent a complex transformation of the Garden of Eden story which serves to conclude the cycle, it also "solves" the problem of cultural vs. natural fruit. Here we have the first mention of wine in a context that directly parallels the transformation of fruit into grain and ultimately bread. Once again, however, there is a transformation of the relations for, in the garden, the sin leads to the transformation of the fruit, while in the case of Ham the fruit transformed by man leads to the sin. Though this relational statement concerning bread and wine is not in the foreground of the whole cycle, its presence is not surprising given the role that bread and wine play as basic food categories throughout the Bible. Indeed, one would be very surprised if their mention was completely absent.

Returning to our starting point, certain observations can be made about the image of God presented in the myth cycle (Genesis 2:4 to 9:29). God gradually creates a universe in which acceptable relations are finally established between Himself, man, the plants, and animals. He does not create order at once and does not find it particularly pleasing. Even in Genesis 9 one gets the impression of a God who is finally satisfied, but not particularly pleased with his creations and the order established.

From the methodological point of view, the focus on the vegetable code has avoided some problems common to both theology and anthropology. In particular, the concern with edible animal and vegetable material has allowed us, at least temporarily, to set aside the problem of the Fall. In theological circles the concern with the Fall, usually expressed as the problem of original sin, is not unlike the consequences of the anthropological concern for the problems of incest so implicit in the Fall. In both cases other structures tend to be overlooked. Furthermore, the focus on the Fall has also meant that the story of Cain and Abel as well as that of Noah are brought into a different perspective. Indeed, with regard to the vegetable and animal codes, one might conclude that the story of Noah is the most important of the three. More

generally, the analysis has shown that the examination of a single code through a myth cycle reveals that different kinds of insights can be gained depending upon the selection of the code to be used.

And lastly, we hope that our analysis has shown that the use of the basic rudiments of Biblical scholarship with regard to the question of sources is not only essential to the credibility of the analysis but greatly adds to the refinement of that analysis. We have concentrated on the Yahwist tradition because this tradition preserves the mythical structure of the cycle better than the priestly tradition, which is basically a theological interpretation of the older material. In addition, we believe that structural analysis, in its present state of development, is better suited to the study of mythical structures than theological structures.²

NOTES

- ¹ There is also the opposition between the two trees in the garden which reflects this opposition of fruit and grain.
Tree of Knowledge Tree of Life
cyclic life (for man) continuous life (for man)
grain = short cyclic life fruit trees = long cyclic life.
- ² In this paper we have intentionally avoided an extended critique of various other attempts to analyse parts of the book of Genesis (e.g. Carroll 1977, Leach 1962 and 1977, and Freilich 1975). Our intention, on the other hand, has been to extend the frame of discourse, in the belief that a wider view is desirable before a full analysis of the problem or a critique of the various approaches is undertaken. Furthermore, we believe that ultimately the analysis will have to be extended to include other ancient Middle Eastern mythological traditions before a full comprehension of those myths that have found their way into the Bible can be achieved. The present analysis, like Genesis 1, is a *beginning*.

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