

Protagonist Corner

God's Dangerous Experiment or

And on the Sixth Day the Creator Took a Very Long Lunch-Break

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"Man, then, was a result of God's curiosity about Himself."

Thomas Mann, *Joseph the Provider*

To do it or not to do it? That was the question. That morning all the lovely creatures had been made. Such a fascinating variety! They were just splendid, running about the firmament, gaping, trying out their brand new voices, sniffing one another, darting about in air and water. Separately and collectively, the brooding Spirit found them *very good*. Very good indeed! Almost perfect! And yet . . .

"They can't talk to me," She found herself thinking as She sat down at the high table for lunch. The morning's burst of making-things-out-of-nothing had been enormous fun, but now She realized that something was still missing: "They *are*, but they don't *know* that they are. Are they *glad* that they are? Are they content? Do they *like* being? What are they thinking about? *Are* they thinking at all? I don't know, omniscient as I'm reputed to be! And they can't tell me."

She wanted—what? Well, She wanted something, someone to answer when she called out, *Where art Thou?* Or at least have the sense to hide! She wanted—yes!—a thinking, speaking, acting, making, evaluating, responding creature, a being independent enough to say Yes, and to say it nicely, or at least interestingly. Well, to say *Amen* representatively, for itself and *in behalf of all the other creatures*. To find inventive ways of expressing gratitude for being.

"Ah, but there's the rub," She said aloud to no-one in particular (though She did notice that one of the young angels, one of that new smart set, looked disturbingly "interested"). "There's the rub: *If they could say Yes, they could also say No!*"

Such a thinking animal could easily become a problem. Capital P! A problem to Her. A problem to all the other creatures. Above all, a problem to itself! A huge, unpredictable, never-ending complication! Capital C!

Having such freedom, it would probably fall into silly boasts about the excellence and rectitude of its will . . . or, on the other hand, it might be so terrified of the choices it was called to make as to seek anonymity, hide away amongst the shrubbery.

Capable of unbounded thought, it might well think itself into debilitating states of anxiety, which to avoid it, might just stop thinking altogether. Or try to. ("Hmm. I must look into the prospect of deliberate un-thinking. Maybe some of the plants in the Garden could be misused in such a sad quest for oblivion.")

Being a "psychosomatic" unity (as, someday, some of its own bright Definers would excitedly announce), would it ever accommodate itself to its unheard-of duality?—like the angels imaging God yet sharing its reproductive drives and much else with the other animals?

Conscious of its vulnerability, it would likely vacillate between abject self-doubt and pathetic attempts at control. Sisyphus or Prometheus. Naturally, either path would

lead to dismal failure and suffering. Would it then perhaps take out its frustrations on the other creatures, lording it over them, misusing them, killing for sport, manipulating natural processes, devising alternative creations; in short, mistaking stewardship for mastery?

Confronted daily by the undeniable limits of its knowledge, wouldn't it inevitably be driven to egocentric quests for all-knowingness, proposing great schemes and ideologies to which everyone must subscribe? Or, on the other hand, would the creature become so morbidly conscious of its ignorance and proneness to error as to seek refuge in sheer stupidity and resignation?

Recognizing its capacity for good and evil, it would surely be torn, wouldn't it, between delusions of moral grandeur and orgies of guilt; or perhaps, when it came to know that even its alleged good was tainted by self-interest, slothful inertia, and feigned helplessness.

As for the creature's necessary (yes, that would of course be necessary!) awareness of its mortality, the Great Spirit Herself could scarcely imagine what that would lead to! Unrelieved melancholia? Self-loathing? Endless repression? Forced and vapid entertainment? Or worse—heaven-bent religion?

Clearly, there were pitfalls on every side. Was not such a creature, therefore, virtually un-do-able? Wouldn't its actualization prove truly irresponsible? Could One really combine so much mind and spirit with so much (for want of a better term) “body?” And so forth.

Forgetful of the excellent vegetarian lunch before Her, gathered fresh from the Garden that morning, the Great Spirit felt something approaching the (for Her) novel experience of Impossibility. “Omnipotence is a fine word,” she said aloud (noting again the exceptional curiosity of the handsome angel on Her left), “yes, *theoretically* all-powerfulness is a necessary attribute for Deity, and I suppose I have it; but the creature I'm contemplating would, I suspect, come too close to having it too, or imagining it did—which would be infinitely worse.”

What a dilemma! If what She desired were indeed a thinking, speaking, deciding, evaluating, acting—well, an *almost-independent* sort of creature, a veritable *image* of Herself—then She could certainly not play the puppeteer and fashion a being who would always *do the right thing*, willy nilly. As this very luncheon meditation once again reminded Her, *even within Her triune Self*, dialogue and difference and the weighing of options and changing One's mind were of the essence! So a being *in Her image* could not—a *priori*—be entirely denied all that. Were not such “dialectics” simply inherent in *thinking*? Yet, left an almost-entirely-free agent, but without Her unique capacity for creatively blending polarities, the creature would undoubtedly, sooner or later, simply self-destruct, perhaps bringing down the whole magnificent creation with it, a *la* that so-called *Goetterdaemrung* piece of the (easily-foreseen!) musical *Faustus* by Richard Wagner.

All through the extended noon-hour of the sixth day, the divine Spirit brooded. She had moved ponderously over the aboriginal waters *for aeons* before daring the wonders She'd already managed, ending just that morning with the creation of all those lovely creeping, flying, and swimming things; but *this—this* needed a lot more brooding. She'd never thought so hard in all eternity! But Time, which She Herself had created earlier that week, was “getting on”; any excusable lunch-break would

have ended an hour ago! (“How is One to get used to this new business of... Time?” However....)

And resolutely pushing back Her chair from the table, She rose, noting as She did so, the finely raised eyebrows of some. Evidently enough, She had made Her decision. There was only one way of resolving the dilemma. It was a conundrum engendered, after all, by her own (if one may be so bold) unorthodox musings, so She Herself would have to answer for any consequences of acting upon them.

Whatever the details might prove to be, the fundamental stratagem would be as follows: having done the thing, She Herself would have actively, relentlessly, to “follow through.” She’d have to move among those odd creatures, “unstable and embarrassing” as they would likely be, move among like a wind, sometimes a cooling breeze, sometimes a regular whirlwind, constantly—*constantly!*—inspiring them to be, to become, to begin again! Without a doubt, She would be obliged to go very far—farther than ever before, absurdly far—in order to be present to them, in them, with them. With Her constant vigilance they might, at least now and then, take heart. With Her tireless encouragement, they might, now and then, here and there, find the will to “go on,” the courage to *be*, despite the often tempting preferability of not-being. Her quiet Presence, hardly-discernable as it would usually be, might sometimes inspire them to believe, evidence to the contrary, that they are not all alone in an indifferent universe. They might find the future-trust they’d need to face and to accept their nearly-impossible condition. Perhaps some of them might even learn to comprehend a little—or even to enjoy—being . . . human!

Of course there was a cost for Her in all that. Her creating would have to be a continuous affair. *Creatio continuo*, as later, a few learned ones would call it. *This* creature couldn’t be created all at once—by *fiat*: just a quick “Let there be” and then instinct takes over..., etc. No, time and again, in fact all the time, She would have to keep bringing something out of nothing, good out of evil, hope out of despair, trust out of fear, love out of indifference and hate, life out of death. She would have to continue *breathing life into that poor lump of clay*, not just to get it going but to keep it going!—to ensure that its evolving would not involve too much simultaneous devolving!

And who knew how far that process would lead? “Creation,” by comparison, was elementary. Re-creation, re-novation, re-formation, re-generation, re-demption, resurrection—Well! That was something else. Clearly, there would be no Aristotelian nonchalance, no eternal Sabbath Rest, for the Instigator of *such* a creature.

For a moment, standing behind Her chair, lost in thought, no longer conscious of nor caring about the raised eyebrows, the Great Spirit hesitated. (Understandably, wouldn’t you agree?) It was a huge risk. It certainly might not work. Was She prepared for Failure? Multiple failures? Radically new Beginnings? To say the least, it was a dangerous experiment. And costly! Very costly!

Then at last, with a determined nod of the Head to the alarmed onlookers, the Great Spirit abruptly walked off. Back to work! The sheer joy of having discourse with such a predictable, unpredictable being, a thinking, responding animal, would outweigh the pain that it would certainly entail for Her—and indeed for all concerned.

So, blithely ignoring the patent incredulity of the Others, and calming for the moment Her own lingering doubts, on the afternoon of the sixth day. . . “God *created human beings* in God’s own image... male and female... And God saw everything

that He had made, and, behold, it was *very good!*”

A Note to Skeptics:

If and insofar as, dear friend, you find my story far fetched and entirely too loaded with *doctrinal* preconceptions, please pause for a moment and consider a Subject nearer home: any father or mother who *intentionally* begets new life, or, after the fact finds that he or she greatly *loves* the begotten being, takes exactly the same risk as does the Begetter of my story. And any father or mother who truly does *love* his or her child will be bound to shepherd and attend its progress or regress in exactly the same way as my “Great Spirit” concludes. It is called *parenting*. And contrary to the flippancy of some humans, it does not stop with the begetting. It goes on and on. And on. It is a huge risk, and it never turns out perfectly. Never! In fact, sometimes it approaches tragedy. It never escapes the tinge of pathos.

But some of us, you know, find that it’s worth the effort. And that is why *parenting* is the archetypal metaphor of the Bible’s picture of the Deity—He who is “Our Father who art in heaven,” She who like a mother hen would “gather” us.

If, dear friend, you know of any other way in which parental love, whether human or divine, can function, please do let me know.

Sincerely,

Douglas John Hall, father of four, grandfather of eight.

Thank you. Merci!

Note: The author of this modest piece acknowledges the help of five or six centuries’ worth of Jewish and Christian Tradition, and of the great twentieth-century storyteller, Thomas Mann, whose insight about the heavenly councils and particularly the “raised eyebrows” at the high table, has been especially suggestive.