

Garden of Eden: Myth, Map, & Meaning - “A Good Myth Will Tell Us Something Valuable about the Human Predicament.”¹ Karen Armstrong; “Truth Knocks At the Mind By Means Of Allegory And Mystery Saying, “Open.”² - St Gregory of Nyssa

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Abstract

“A good myth will tell us something valuable about the human predicament.” Karen Armstrong - “Truth knocks at the mind by means of allegory and mystery saying, “Open.” - St Gregory of Nyssa
Ancient “Divinity Myths” incorporate Symbolic Maps and Ideals of Social-Moral Order (distinct from Heroic Myths). There is a correlation between mythic divine symbolism and social moral order: Moses and the 10 Commandments; Ur-Nammu; Hammurabi Code; Gods of Mesopotamia (Shamash, Marduk, Enki, Nabu, Inanna, Enlil, and Anu), as well as Zeus and Indra. Symbolism is a critical part of social structure and group formation. It would seem an inescapable conclusion that myths did have a significant social function. After the Golden Calf incident, God reveals to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,” Historically there is a distinct connection between spiritual-religious beliefs and social-moral order. Furthermore, there are studies which demonstrate a correlation between spirituality and compassion. (Saslow)

The Garden of Eden Myth in Genesis of the Bible is perhaps the quintessential illustration of a myth as a symbolic map - narrative. The core of the myth is the act of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Even a precursory analysis of that myth would reveal the allegorical and symbolical act as the act of a “meaning seeking animal.” Further, the myth and narrative convey the understanding that the knowledge of good and evil invokes an evidently painful self-awareness that invokes strong feelings of shame and guilt. After all, Adam and Eve did cover their genitals with fig leaves. It is noteworthy that self-awareness is highlighted in the myth because very few animal species appear to have any self-awareness since few can recognize themselves in mirrors (i.e. chimpanzees, elephants). It’s as if the author wanted to highlight the characteristics that distinguish a human being from animals. Every scientist will tell you that the human brain and the human mind – as in knowledge - are the most distinctive characteristics of the human being – particularly the prefrontal cortex.

Confucius

Is symbolism relevant today? My argument is that when you take a close look at the garden of Eden myth

it is actually a relatively realistic map-model of human consciousness.

Symbolism Marginalized due to Researcher Bias: Rene Guenon stated that “Materialism is the denial of everything that is of a supra-individual order”, which of course would automatically be a serious “researcher bias” Guenon’s assessment in his 1945 book *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* appears correct. Historically, three important aspects of consciousness have been sidelined and marginalized (supported by statements by scholars): Symbolism (Researcher Bias p.31-32 – 6 references); Social Consciousness (Researcher Bias p.33-35 - 10 references), and Spirituality (Researcher Bias p.35-37 – 14 references),³

1. Rollo May, an American existential psychologist and author, observes. “There has been a radical change during the past three decades... Neither term, "symbol" or "myth," even appears in the index of the standard psychology textbooks.”⁴
2. Sociologist Elzbieta Halas had parallel observations on how symbolism had been largely marginalized as an epiphenomenon” Elzbieta Halas states: “Too often symbolism is thought of as an epiphenomenon, a phenomenon that is derivative of what are considered to be more important factors, such as business, resources, power, organization, etc. which are allegedly ‘objective’ facts.”⁵
3. Clifford Geertz, the iconic anthropologist, stated that much of academia developed without “seriously examining ideologies as systems of interacting symbols, as patterns of interworking meanings!”⁶

Briefly I would add that Guenon’s *Reign of Quantity* beat out McGilchrist’s 2009 book by many years. Claudia Nielsen, who wonders if the materialist pendulum hasn’t swung too far, points out, that the scholar Iain McGilchrist states: “The scope of inquiry and understanding of the Materialist Doctrine with its rigid adherence to the actually arbitrary principle of quantification and over-emphasis on physiological characteristics [and laboratory experiments – Kay Deaux] is severely restricted and limited in the analyses that can be performed.”

To understand something, whether we are aware of it or not, depends on choosing a model. We get to understand what we see by comparing it with something else, something that we think we understand better. But what we compare it with turns out to have a huge influence on the outcome.⁷

- Iain McGilchrist

Modern politics and religion have proved Confucius right. For example, on the Greek island of Tinos in the Aegean Sea the Panagia Evangelistria church, which has an icon of the Virgin Mary by reputation and legend responsible for miracles, has a pilgrimage every year for the Dormition of the Virgin Mary. To display and express their utter devotion and conviction, many pilgrims crawl on their hands and knees the 800 meters of stone steps ascending to the church. Symbols can be very powerful. Abraham Heschel, theologian and scholar, concluded that flags are the best illustration of how powerful symbols can be. 11 million soldiers died in WWI, and every single one was a “patriot”. The British army suffered 50,000 wounded and dead in one day in the Battle of the Somme. There are very powerful emotions attached to patriotism and flags. During the American civil war, when Union soldiers learned there would be a frontal assault the next day during the battle of Cold Harbor, soldiers wrote farewell letters to their families and pinned them to the back of their uniforms. Symbols are extremely powerful.

Myths as Symbolic Maps

My argument is that when you take a close look at the garden of Eden myth it is actually a pretty accurate

description-model of human consciousness. The same is true when you look at ancient myths. Myths are symbolic maps of social-moral order.

Ancient “Divinity Myths” incorporate Symbolic Maps and Ideals of Social-Moral Order (distinct from Heroic Myths). There is a correlation between mythic divine symbolism and social moral order: Moses and the 10 Commandments; Ur-Nammu; Hammurabi Code; Gods of Mesopotamia (Shamash, Marduk, Enki, Nabu, Inanna, Enlil, and Anu), as well as Zeus and Indra. Symbolism is a critical part of social structure and group formation. It would seem an inescapable conclusion that myths did have a significant social function. After the Golden Calf incident, God reveals to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7: “And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,” Historically there is a distinct connection between spiritual-religious beliefs and social-moral order. Furthermore, there are studies which demonstrate a correlation between spirituality and compassion.

Rene Guenon has some interesting insights in the symbolism of the Garden of Eden

Perspective: The original Hebrew word for knowledge in the Garden of Eden is da'at (דַּעַת), derived from the verb yada (יָדָע), which means to know. In biblical Hebrew, yada denotes an intimate, relational, and experiential familiarity gained through direct encounter or observation, rather than just abstract or theoretical mental awareness

“Eden, the place and state of perfect communion with God in which mortality is unknown: it follows then, as Guénon says, that ‘the real meaning of the “fall” is the abandonment of the Centre and consequent drift into quantity’. Those living there [in the centre], as they are immersed in the presence of God, embody the closest thing possible in this domain to pure quality.” In describing the fall of man – which could be best understood in terms of his critique of materialism as a dehumanizing reduction to physiology and molecules in *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*. Published in 1945, “Deprived as we are of the possibility of transformation, deprived even of our humanity, we cyborg beings are flung by modernity ever further away from the Centre, with the result that the faculties which had once enabled us to experience God in the world begin to atrophy.”⁸

Guenon highlights ‘Identity’ as a critical characteristic in symbolism. “As Guénon puts it: ‘the being must above all identify the centre of its own individuality (represented by the heart in traditional symbolism) with the cosmic centre of the state of existence to which this individuality belongs’” Guenon emphasizes the critical role of “heart” in spirituality. “According to Guénon: “knowledge of the Heart’ is the direct perception of the intelligible light, of that Light of the Word spoken of by St John in the prologue of his Gospel, that radiant Light of the ‘Spiritual Sun’ which is the true ‘Heart of the World’. The Word makes the world transparent to truth, and the truth is that the world is essentially unfallen and divine.”⁹

Spiritual Identity

Viktor Frankl: Dr. P. Wong emphasizes Viktor Frankl’s principle: “that human beings have a spiritual core with an innate need for meaning. In other words, the innermost core of the “self” is spiritual....”¹⁰

Edgar Cayce observed: "The spiritual self is life, the activity of the mental and physical is of the soul - and therefore a soul-body" (Edgar Cayce reading 3590-2). Keep the mental forces in tune with your higher self and rise above the conditions that beset the mind, for if we are to give the best of ourselves to those who depend on us, we must have physically fit bodies. form and spirits above the lower level. So, do it! (3991-1)

Forging Identity and Conquering Reality

"We cannot live in a world that is not our own, in a world that is interpreted for us by others."¹¹

Hildegard de Bingen

"A good myth will tell us something valuable about the human predicament."¹² Karen Armstrong

The Introduction of the Hercules Myths into Sicily after colonization.

Homer's Iliad (circa 8th century BCE): Contains early references to his labors, capturing the monster Cerberus, and his apotheosis (becoming a god). The Greeks began colonizing Sicily in the mid-8th century BC, primarily between 750 and 730 BC. Hercules' adventures, including his encounters in Sicily, are part of the broader Greek mythological tradition that developed during and after the colonization period. The Greek colonization period spanned roughly from 750 to 550 BCE. During this era, independent Greek city-states (poleis) established over 100 new settlements (apoikiai) across the Mediterranean and Black Seas. These expansions were driven by population growth, land scarcity, and the search for new trade routes. The myths of Hercules in Sicily emerged after the Greeks colonized the island, to legitimize their presence and culturally absorb indigenous populations. The first documented references and cultic traditions emerged when Greek settlers from Chalcis and Corinth arrived in Sicily. They localized older mainland hero myths to Sicilian geography, using Hercules to legitimize Greek presence. "The hero and god Herakles, often known by his Roman name Hercules, was widely invoked across the Greek world in order to justify Greek colonization of land and territory, as well as Greek rule over Greeks and non-Greeks."¹³ (HERAKLES AT THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, Hampton Evans) Early human societies were "creating reality" not measuring reality. The Sicily-Hercules case would be an excellent illustration of Colonialism as power and control – where a foreign power takes over and enforces their views and rules.

Spirituality as a Motivation

In my limited conversations people who have had spiritual experiences, the importance of motivation in spiritual experience was readily apparent. That being said – in spite of the fact that spiritual and religious beliefs have been a major factor in humanity, from my research I could not find any mainstream sources for spiritual-religious beliefs as motivation. Historically spirituality has been a prevalent factor throughout history. Here are just some of the Spiritual and Devotional Poets:

1. Sufi Poets: Rumi, Hafiz, Kabir, Omar Khayyam, Attar, Rabia al Basri, Bulleh Shah, Al – Hallaj
2. Indian-Hindu Poets Sri Aurobindo, Ramprasad, Sri Chinmoy, Swami Vivekananda, Kalidasa, Paramahansa Yogananda, Mirabai, Sarojini Naidu, Rabindranath Tagore, Tulsidas
3. Christian Poets, Hildegard of Bingen, St Teresa of Avila, St John of the Cross, St. Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart, St Therese of Lisieux, St Catherine of Siena, Moses
4. Buddhist (and Zen) Poets Lord Buddha, Dogen, Hanshan, Ryokan, Thich Nhat Hahn
5. Chinese / Daoist Poets Lao Tzu, Tu Fu, Li Po/ Li Bai, Chuang Tzu, Confucius, Wu Men

Spirituality Marginalized and Rocks on Mars – the Denial of everything of a supra-individual order!

Researcher Bias: Guenon states that Materialism is "the denial of everything that is of a supra-individual order", which of course be a serious "researcher bias" Guenon's assessment appears correct. Historically, three important aspects of consciousness have been sidelined.

Joe Holland, Catholic theologian, states "The late-modern secularized [materialist] forms of economic, cultural, and political institutions, including secularized universities, are now blocking out spiritual meaning."¹⁴ From my research, unfortunately, that is too true!

Kenneth J Pargament and Annette Mahoney state that: “Researchers [psychologists] have tended to study spirituality “from a distance,” relying on surveys that contain global distal measures,¹⁵

Since the dawn of the Space Age, humanity has launched over 217 deep space exploration probes and over 19,000 artificial spacecraft and satellites to explore our solar system. Since the first dedicated space telescope launched in 1968, well over 100 space telescopes have been placed into orbit by global space agencies, including NASA and the ESA. It seems rocks on mars have more scientific value than spiritual people in the real world

Symbolism and Social-Moral Order

1. “Groups exist [as] common symbolization [which] create a social order”¹⁶ - Elzbieta Halas
2. “Every culture is common symbolic expression.”¹⁷ D. Balaganapath
3. “The creative faculty of human beings makes them bestow values upon things freely, actively and arbitrarily, driving them towards symbolization. This symbol-making tendency is innate in man.”¹⁸ Leslie White (1995)

Karen Armstrong and Philo of Alexandria

Karen Armstrong, a scholar of religion states, “a good myth will tell us something valuable about the human predicament. Myths, generally speaking, are allegorical stories that are offered as genuine reflections, in some sense, of reality and the world.” Armstrong states, “In the pre-modern world, for example, Jews, Christians and Muslims all relished highly allegorical interpretations of scripture: as the word of God, it was infinite and could not be confined to one interpretation.”¹⁹

Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE – c. 50 CE) considered the anthropomorphism of the Bible to be an impiety that was incompatible with the Platonic conception of "God in opposition to matter", instead interpreting the ascription to God of hands and feet, eyes and ears, tongue and windpipe, as allegories!²⁰

St Gregory of Nyssa stated, “Truth knocks at the mind by means of allegory and mystery saying, “Open.”.....As the Gospel says, whoever lives in accord with Christ’s is his brother and sister [Mt 12.50]. You must approach the truth and be its companion so that you are not separated from it. You must be perfect like the dove, that is, you must lack nothing and be completely filled with innocence and purity.”²¹ (p.203 11th homily)

Symbolism and Prehistoric Art

Symbols and symbolism have been evident in prehistoric art from the dawning of civilization. Karen Armstrong highlights prehistoric cave art as the first evidence for human ideologies can be found in the prehistoric cave paintings of “shamans” in the French and Spanish caves dating as far back as twenty or thirty thousand years. Besides the numerous religious art works of the Renaissance, Chelsea Ann Rulofson observes that: “Some modern art movements coined their own spirituality and reflected it in their art; it is easy to see this in artists such as Paul Klee, Franz Marc, and Wassily Kandinsky.”²² I would add that historically, divine inspiration has often been a hallmark of creativity.

Parables, Stories and Modern Fandoms

Today there are thousands of “fandoms” – subcultures of fans of TV or movie films. While niche communities are countless, a handful of massive franchises dominate global pop culture, social media, and fan labor:

1. Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)

2. Harry Potter / Wizarding World
3. Star Wars
4. BTS (ARMY)
5. Minecraft
6. The Lord of the Rings

Historically, both Jesus Christ and Buddha spoke in parables and stories – a good perspective, I believe is to look at myths as parables. Of course you can't take parables literally.

Garden of Eden Myth

The Garden of Eden Myth in Genesis of the Bible is perhaps the quintessential illustration of a myth as a symbolic map - narrative. The core of the myth is the act of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. Even a precursory analysis of that myth would reveal the allegorical and symbolical act as the act of a "meaning seeking animal." Further, the myth and narrative convey the understanding that the knowledge of good and evil invokes an evidently painful self-awareness that invokes strong feelings of shame and guilt. After all, Adam and Eve did cover their genitals with fig leaves. It is noteworthy that self-awareness is highlighted in the myth because very few animal species appear to have any self-awareness since few can recognize themselves in mirrors (i.e. chimpanzees, elephants). It's as if the author wanted to highlight the characteristics that distinguish a human being from animals. Every scientist will tell you that the human brain and the human mind – as in knowledge - are the most distinctive characteristics of the human being – particularly the prefrontal cortex.

Setting the Stage: Connection between Spirituality and Meaning

New Integrative Approach: Synthesis-Consensus of William James, Viktor Frankl, and Carl Jung - Dr. Paul Wong (Professor Emeritus of Trent University and Trinity Western University, and founding President of INPM)

After I approached Dr Wong with a brief summary of my Synthesis Consensus of Viktor Frankl, William James, and Carl Jung, looked it over and observed: "Your approach is new in the sense of a broad-minded integrative approach, breaking down the artificial traditional divide between science and religious, or scientific psychology versus humanistic or psychoanalytic psychology." He went on to suggest that "A new integrative approach" would be suitable."

Carl Jung argued that "spirit" [spiritual processes] are autonomous unconscious processes with a capability to over-ride the ego similar to how the conscience can over-ride the ego. As Butler-Bowden observed, "James' conclusion was that a state of faith could transform a life utterly, even though what is believed strictly speaking may not exist. Religion can genuinely heal a person, integrating what before was fragmented." That is James argued that spiritual and religious experiences can create a sense of reality.

Carl Jung: "Spirit gives meaning to his [man's] life" - (CW8:643) Jung observed (CW8: 648 -1968 revised) that "Life and spirit are two powers or necessities between which man is placed. Spirit gives meaning to his life, and the possibility of its greatest development. But life is essential to spirit, since its truth is nothing if it cannot live."²³

Dr. Paul Wong elaborates Viktor Frankl's views: "The noetic (spiritual, specifically human) dimension contains such qualities as our will to meaning [Frankl's central concept of humanity's primary drive] our goal orientation, ideas and ideals, creativity, imagination, faith, love that goes beyond the physical, a

conscience beyond the superego, self-transcendence, commitments, responsibility, a sense of humor, and the freedom of choice making."²⁴ (Fabry 1994 pp.18-19) (p.156)

William James: "They [abstractions (symbols) and spiritual emotions-experiences] determine our vital attitude as decisively as the vital attitude of lovers is determined by the habitual sense, They are convincing to those who have them as any direct sensible experiences can be, and they are, as a rule, much more convincing than results established by mere logic are.....if you do have them, and have them at all strongly, the probability is that you cannot help regarding them as genuine perceptions of truth, as revelations of a kind of reality [my underlining] which no adverse argument, however unanswerable by you in words, can expel from your belief" is what William James emphasizes in his classic work, originally published in 1902, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*²⁵. (P.47) William James goes on to say that religious experiences and spiritual experiences create and generate a "sense of reality"²⁶ (p.48)

Paul Wong, observes, "religious and spiritual beliefs and practice are thought to serve as a central component of an individual's orienting system, which helps the individual understand, appraise, and derive meaning from stressful life events and ultimately helps that individual decide how to react."²⁷ (p. xl Quest)

Tree of Knowledge – Knowledge Relates to Meaning and Purpose

A central theme of the narrative is that Adam and Eve ate from the tree of knowledge and thus knew good from bad. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is mentioned in Genesis 2:9, where God causes it to grow in the Garden of Eden alongside the Tree of Life. Adam was permitted to eat freely from all other trees, but God commanded that he must not eat from this tree, warning that doing so would result in death (Genesis 2:16-17). The Hebrew phrase for the tree, 'ēṣ hadda'at tōb wārā', literally means "tree of the knowledge of good and evil," Also, in ancient Hebrew the word "knowledge" had a distinct connotation of knowledge in context of an intimate and a personal connection with God.

In many Christian schools of thought man's "free will" is an important aspect in religious beliefs. By forbidding its fruit, God provided Adam and Eve with a genuine choice, allowing them to exercise free will and moral discernment. Without this choice, humanity would have been like automatons, incapable of true obedience or love. Eating from the tree would grant knowledge of good and evil, meaning humans would understand moral distinctions and experience the consequences of sin

Yada

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for knowledge, as expressed in root "yada," appears nearly 950 times so it is a word that is important to everyday life and functioning. It's usage in the Bible expressed a generally wider understanding of the word as opposed to the rather narrow definition of knowledge in terms of rational analysis, scientific facts or philosophical truths as current usage would indicate. Yada includes all manner of workmanship and construction as well as perceiving, learning, understanding, willing, performing, and experiencing. To know is not to be intellectually informed about some abstract principle, but to grasp the world and experience truth. Knowledge is not the passive internalization of information and facts, but rather the shared fulfillment of being and the expression of the actualization of knowledge (and God).

Yet, as Biblical scholars point out, perhaps the most salient and significant characteristic of the ancient Hebrew understanding and usage of "knowledge" is that it definitely indicates more personal and intimate relationship which is far removed from the contemporary understanding as something impersonal and

objective. There is an aspect of subjectivity that the ancient Hebrews embraced. Eternal scientific or philosophical truths as well as “facts” seem to be the general understanding of “knowledge” today - which is completely different from how the ancient Jews understood knowledge. Blaise Pascal a mathematician, physicist, writer and theologian observed, “Human beings must be known to be loved; but Divine beings must be loved to be known.”²⁸ I always had some problems grasping that statement but it seems oddly appropriate in this context.

Commentary and Perspective: Rappaport’s argues that: “The empirical and logical rationality that now only discovers and ascertains facts but that defines knowledge as knowledge of fact is not hospitable to the authority of either sanctity or value. Ultimate sacred postulates are no longer even counted as knowledge but are mere beliefs, if not superstitions.”²⁹ (Rappaport p. 130 Ecology, Meaning, & Religion) The Garden of Eden Myth, as a narrative, conveys the idea of the human being as a “meaning seeking animal” (eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge) in whom self-awareness (shame and guilt) happens due to knowledge gained of wrong or right and good and evil. The fig leaves covering their genitals, of course, highlights the issue of sexuality in human beings, and sex is, for better or worse, a powerful force in human nature.

Analysis of Symbolism in the Garden of Eden

Suffering: “Man is not destroyed by suffering; he is destroyed by suffering without meaning”³⁰ (Paul Wong quotes Viktor Frankl)

The Garden of Eden Myth, besides putting perspective on human consciousness and morality, also explains suffering. God, of course, once He finds out Adam and Eve has eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge renders a judgment: In Genesis 17, God, speaking to Adam, says because thou “hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. 18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. 19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”

Suffering is a very human problem – which, of course, requires an explanation or rationalization. So, the Garden of Eden Myth explains suffering, and in the myth-script man cannot blame anyone but himself. Karen Armstrong observes, “Like art, religion is an attempt to construct meaning in the face of the relentless pain and injustice of life. As meaning seeking creatures, men and women fall very easily into despair. They have created religions and works of art to help them find value in their lives, despite all the dispiriting evidence to the contrary.”³¹ (Case p.8)

It is interesting that Karen Armstrong makes the connection between pain and suffering and meaning. Several psychologists note that pain and suffering frequently invoke meaning seeking processes in the mind – which would seem natural since the brain asks of itself, “Why is this (pain) happening?”

The myth of the Garden of Eden and the fall of man explains the origin of sin and suffering in the world, underscoring the consequences of disobedience to God’s commands and the loss of intimate fellowship with the Creator. The expulsion from Eden symbolizes the transition from a state of innocence and divine communion to a life of hardship and separation due to sin. The narrative has influenced Christian doctrines such as Original Sin and the need for salvation through Christ, and it has inspired countless works of art, literature, and philosophy.

Narratives and Scripts

Pausanias, a Greek traveler and geographer of the 2nd century AD, wrote his Description of Greece as a guide to the cultural and religious landscape of the Greek mainland. His narrative blends firsthand observations with historical accounts, local legends, and mythological stories, providing a rich cultural geography of ancient Greece. From his research in folklore and myths, Pausanias concluded – in part because some folklore was obviously ‘make believe’ – that “narratives were more important than the content of the stories.

The Myths and Folklore that Pausanias describes are fascinating. The Oracle of Delphi's "He goat" prophecy“ - "When the he-goat drinks Neda's swirling water, I have abandoned Messene; destruction comes.” After the battle in which the Arcadians had been bought off, the Messenians had gone to Delphi to get an oracle and that is what the Pythian Priestess prophesied. In the middle of a war with Sparta, the Messenians were, of course, terrified that a he-goat might come near Neda. There is a wild fig tree named olynthe, which Messenians call “he-goat.” The Messenian prophet, Theokles, discovered to his horror a wild fig tree that had grown over the river Neda and whose leaves touched the water, and realized the meaning of that.³²

The Messenians lost the war with Sparta, My daughter remarked one day when something bad had happened that “There had to be a reason for that”. In that context the “he-goat” prophecy makes some sense.

Self-Awareness, Guilt and Existential Exile

God then banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and places two Cherubim to guard the Garden of Eden. Genesis 24 So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim, and the flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way to the tree of life.”

The Garden of Eden symbolizes innocence, purity, and perfect fellowship with God. It represents humanity's original state of harmony with creation and divine order. Eden is often interpreted as a temple-like space, where God dwelt with humans, highlighting the intimate relationship intended between God and humanity. The narrative illustrates the transition from innocence to moral knowledge, explaining the human experience of sin, suffering, and mortality

Jean-Jacques Rousseau posited that human consciousness shifted from an authentic, peaceful "state of nature" to a corrupted, alienated state due to civilization. He argued that society replaced natural instincts with destructive pride (amour-propre), and he championed inner conscience and emotion as our truest guides

The philosopher, Stephen Burr, argues that the banishment from the Garden of Eden is a mythic source for the existent worldly existential exile of human beings. However, in the myth the knowledge of good and evil is the force that causes a self-awareness resulting in shame and guilt.

Need for Meaning and Drive to Understand

The psychologists, G. Reker, J. Birren, and C Svensson observe: “When we ask, “What is the meaning of life?” we are asking: “What is worth living for? What is the purpose of life?” Such questions call for value judgments and cannot be answered apart from one's belief system or worldview.”³³ (p.386 Quest) Any question about purpose is essentially a question of motivation, purpose, worldview and ideology. There is a consensus of scientists that meaning is critical in human consciousness – such as Clifford Geertz, Roy

Baumeister, Viktor Frankl, Paul Wong, Abraham Heschel, and Karen Armstrong. All scientists tell you that the human brain is the most significant characteristic that defines human beings.

So, the centrality of the “tree of knowledge” in the Garden of Eden Myth would be an accurate mapping of humanness. In that context, the Garden of Eden Myth portrays the human being as a “meaning seeking animal” with the important characteristics of self-awareness with guilt and shame as well as sexuality, which needless to say, is an important factor in human nature.

Myths, of course, predate the written scriptures – possibly by thousands of years if not tens of thousands of years. Some anthropologists believe the Australian “Dreamtime” myth dates back tens of thousands of years. From the dawn of civilization, then, it would seem “meaning” has been a powerful intellectual and spiritual force in human beings and humanity.

Symbolism, Allegories and Narratives

It is clear that myths, on the face of it, are narratives or stories. Psychologists believe children as young as three start telling narratives. Narratives are an everyday thing because, if you think about it, you are creating a story during the day, each and every day as we do and say things we weave a story in our heads – a story of where one goes, what one does, who one sees, why things happen and so forth. When humans discovered fire and created campfires and the tribes people gathered around the campfire, it would seem likely that narratives originated with the discovery of fire millions of years ago.

As Dan McAdams points out, “stories meet a basic human need for belongingness... They transport us to another social world... Moreover when we share stories of personal experiences here on earth, without the vampires and the wizards, those stories bind us to the human collectives wherein our social action and our motivated projects find their daily meaning. Stories may be the perfect binding mechanism for the cognitively gifted, eusocial species we find ourselves to be, teaching us how to be human as they affirm our membership within human groups.”³⁴ (p. 268 to 269)

Spiritual-Religious Beliefs as Social Consciousness and Social-Moral Order

Social perception-consciousness is social order: Ramon Reyes highlights the unifying aspect of spirituality in prehistoric Philippine societies and early human societies: “In sum, social and moral order encompasses the living the dead the deities and the spirits.”³⁵ That is the spiritual and religious beliefs of early human societies created and maintained a social consciousness – a social-moral order. You can see in the mythology of Zeus that the same principle applies. Zeus epitomized law and order, wisdom, hospitality and oaths – all prosocial values.

Ramon Reyes research supports Durkheim’s argument: “Indeed, the whole Ifugao social order, including practical ways of life, social institutions and rules, morality and everything else, constitutes a unitary system; and it is looked upon as a religious phenomenon of supernatural origin. Describing an example of this prehistoric Filipino world-view, an anthropologist says,... “In treating the environment as social, the people are provided with an ordered explanation of 'natural' phenomena. In sum, one social and moral order encompasses the living, the dead, the deities and the spirits, and the total environment.”³⁶

Norse Myth of the Tree of Knowledge

Yggdrasil is the immense, sacred ash tree in Norse mythology that serves as the central “World Tree,” connecting the nine realms, including Asgard and Midgard. It represents the cosmos, life, and knowledge.

Odin notoriously hung from its branches for nine days to gain knowledge of the runes, making it a pivotal source of wisdom

The Zeus Pandora Myths as Narrative on Pain

“Perhaps the most famous historical touchstone [of hope] involves the myth of Pandora. Zeus, who was angry with Prometheus for stealing fire from the Gods, sent Pandora to earth with a box filled mostly with evil creatures. Knowing that Pandora would ignore his instructions to keep the box unopened, Zeus extracted his revenge as Pandora unleashed all but one of the creatures before she replaced the lid. That creature was hope. The myth of Pandora proclaims hope to be the great consolation that makes human cares and troubles seem bearable (Smith, 1983). Spanning the centuries, Pandora's consolatory creature has been treated as both a blessing and a curse.”³⁷ (Hope and Death, C R Synder et al)

Keywords: myth, mythology, religious studies, spirituality, symbolism, Garden of Eden, Social – Moral Order, Social Consciousness, Rene Guenon, Iain McGilChrist

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