

"in the image of God...male and female he created them":  
Three ancient interpretations of Genesis 1:26-28

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Senior Honors Thesis

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<sup>26</sup>Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."<sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female created he them.<sup>28</sup> And God blessed them... (Gen.1:26-28, RSV)

### I. Introduction

It is a deceptively simple text. At the most accessible level, it tells a story. Some of the characters have been introduced in earlier verses of the first book of Genesis: God, earth, the fish and fowl, the cattle, and the creeping things. Humanity though, the male and female, the created-in-God's-image ones- they are a new part of the Genesis narrative, and they are first introduced in these verses. In subsequent verses more detail will be added as the story is retold: male and female will be a man and a woman, they will be given names and personalities, will be described in particular actions and quoted in particular discourse. In Genesis 1:26-28, however, we are given our introduction to humanity in the bare bones of the plot: God makes humanity, makes it in God's image and likeness, makes it male and female. God gives humanity dominion over the previous creations, and blesses it.

The depths of even a simple story- or, perhaps, especially a simple story- may be plumbed. Sacred texts (as part of Genesis, this text is contained in both the Christian and Hebrew canons) are customarily examined, explored, elaborated upon- interpreted. Historically, scholars did not study a text just as it stood. Any new

understanding of a scriptural passage was arrived at by viewing the text with its attached interpretations, through sifting one's way through the layers of meaning and explanation which surround the words. In the Hebrew tradition, standard interpretations are sometimes even printed along the margins of the scripture. For Christians, nearly every influential religious writer from the first century onwards included scriptural interpretation in his/her philosophizing and apologetics. Thinking about the Church, about the Christian life, about the foundations of the faith, required wrestling with the Bible. For the Old Testament, that meant reckoning with Jewish interpretation as well; the text was not passed on to the Christians "clean," but already carried accepted interpretations which would have to be accommodated to the Christian message or dealt with in some satisfactory way.

With this interest in the history of interpretation, I would like to discuss three influential interpreters of Genesis 1:26-28. This text is particularly evocative for modern interpreters and commentators, and such writers first brought the text to my attention. Feminist interpreters, especially, draw attention to the plural language of verse 26 ("Let us make man") and to its implications about the nature of God. Some have asked whether the plural statement followed by the description of humans created in God's image, "male and female," does not imply something traditionally unexpected about the nature of God- a duality, or a male-female tension within the deity. In examining three ancient interpreters of the text, I am curious about their evaluations of the nature of God, especially as that nature is reflected in humanity. Explorations of God's nature and of human likeness to it- "in the image of God"- must necessarily involve each writer in the integral questions

of faith. What of humanity is akin to God: minds, souls, spirits? Does the recognition of that likeness, in whatever form, dictate how religious lives should be lived? Does the definition of that likeness also delineate which aspects of humanity are therefore to be disciplined or discouraged? And, in the end, will the ancient interpreters raise the same sorts of questions commentators raise about the text today?

The three interpreters I will examine are each important figures in the history of Biblical interpretation: Philo, Origen, and Augustine. Philo represents the Jewish interpretations with which the text arrived in Christian hands. He represents this more symbolically than literally—his interpretations, seeking to synthesize Jewish scripture and Greek philosophy, often stray far from the more traditional rabbinical interpretations. Nevertheless, Philo is an important thread in the Jewish interpretive tradition; his works not only interpret, but discuss how and why interpretation is valuable. Origen, too, is often far from the mainstream of his tradition (Christian); eventually, some of his interpretations are declared heretical by the Church.<sup>1</sup> He shared many of Philo's neo-Platonic philosophical views, and wrote a great deal, as Philo did, about allegorical interpretive method.<sup>2</sup> Despite the Church's condemnation of him as a heretic, Origen's theological and interpretive work ranked with the best the early Church produced, and continued to be studied by students of scripture long after being branded heretical. Beryl Smalley makes the claim in her introduction to The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages that Origen's interpretations are among the last in the Christian church to clearly display the influence of disparate interpretive methods—Neo-Platonist, for example. "These [Origen's commentaries] give us our last chance to distinguish

what would soon be no longer various traditions juxtaposed, but one tradition of interpretation."<sup>3</sup>

Augustine represents the trend that would follow: methods gleaned from different traditions shaped into a single interpretive style, a distinctively Christian method. His writings illustrate the solidifying of interpretive methods into a cohesive methodology which would characterize Christian interpretation of scripture through the Middle Ages.<sup>4</sup> He did not single-handedly engineer this compilation, but his work with scripture, and with this Genesis text in particular, represents the interpretation the Church would accept as standard. His uses of the passage in theological discussion and his explanations of the text's meaning would be regarded as normative, particularly as concerned male/female relations.

The interpretations of these exegetes take place in a variety of settings- in works devoted to scriptural interpretation, as illustrative examples in homilies, as explanatory texts for treatises against heretics, and as exercises in theology or philosophy. I will attempt to evaluate each author's interpretations- for generally, each will use the text in a variety of ways and explain it from different angles- in the light of the interpretation's writing. Each writer elucidates, concretely or implicitly, his philosophy of interpretation, his beliefs about how scripture should be studied and its mysteries revealed; I wish to explore the idea of why we interpret, of how we treat sacred texts and what we expect them to offer us. As we discussed earlier, though, the text itself is of particular importance and is not just an example through which to view interpretive styles. So I have a dual purpose: to disentangle the meanings and implications of Genesis 1:26-28

for these three writers, and to examine how their treatments of a sacred text and their elucidations of what they find there illustrate method's service to meaning. Does Augustine's solidification of interpretive method also represent a solidification of meaning? If Philo and Origen, as we will see, use allegory to open a text up to understanding and interpretations, does Augustine's method box in the verses, close down the options for readers? What do these interpreters have to tell us about the connections between the way a text is approached and what will be found there?

## II. Philo

Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish interpreter and philosopher who was active during the first half of the first century A.D. His distinctive style and methods were in many ways distinguished from traditional rabbinical interpretive method- particularly by his use of allegory and philosophy. He has been called the "Cicero of allegory," not for inventing but for popularizing allegory as a method of scriptural interpretation.<sup>5</sup> Living in Alexandria, the center of classical learning, Philo, a practicing Jew, sought "to show that whatever the letter of the inspired text might say, its inner or spiritual meaning was in harmony with Platonism."<sup>6</sup> This philosophical bent is particularly true in Philo's use of language and analogy- he often brings concepts together to reach conclusions which seem obscure without the knowledge that the author sought to reconcile his Jewish interpretive tradition with Platonic thought.

Philo deals with Genesis 1:26-28 at greatest length in his treatise, "On the Creation." Systematically interpreting the first book

of Genesis, Philo moves from verse to verse in as orderly and organized a fashion as he is capable of- a translator remarks "he is an inveterate rambler...it is the mark of a true rambler that his points are always connected, and that he is unable to keep himself from following up each connection as it occurs".<sup>7</sup> This is often true of Philo, and is one characteristic he shares with the rabbinic interpretive method, the tendency to leap from one concept to another, dragging the reader to far-flung parts of the scriptures. Here in his treatment of the creation account, however, he is fairly methodical. The result is that, as opposed to his mentions of the text in other treatises where it is brought in to make a certain point, here Philo attempts to examine all the most pertinent aspects of the text's interpretation. We can discuss Philo's points, then, in the order in which they are dealt with in "On the Creation", and bring in the other, more scattered references as they concern the particular topics under discussion.

#### II.A. "Image of God"

First Philo deals with the "image of God" language: "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness"..." (Gn.1:26 RSV) Make no mistake, Philo insists- "neither is God in human form, nor is the human body God-like".<sup>8</sup> The word "image", Philo argues, is used in connection to the mind. He explains that the mind is in a sense God to each person who carries it and reverences it; the mind occupies a place in humanity "precisely answering to that which the great Ruler occupies in all the world."<sup>9</sup> This section continues at some length, elaborating upon the concrete details of the likeness between God and the human mind. Both are invisible, seeing and perceiving without being



themselves seen or perceived. The mind, Philo continues with growing enthusiasm, opens pathways to the arts and sciences, examines the earth and the oceans, soars above them through the atmosphere and the ether and "the circuit of heaven", and flies on to contemplate and join the rhythmical dances of the stars and planets. Seeing all that is perceptible and continuing on to contemplate the "patterns and originals of the things of sense"- I take this to mean philosophy- the mind aspires to see and perceive that which is most high, but "amid its longing to see Him, pure and untempered rays of concentrated light stream forth like a torrent, so that by its gleams the eye of the understanding is dazzled."<sup>10</sup> That is, the mind, despite its likeness to God, is unable to "see" or understand God.

Philo is fascinated with the theories surrounding the "in God's image" language of the creation account. Of the twelve or so indexed references to Genesis 1:26-27 scattered through Philo's other works, five concern those phrases: "Let us make man in our image and likeness" and "God created man in His image, in the image of God he created him." One reference is from "On Dreams," a set of works exploring God's role in sending dreams- our reference comes from a section discussing dreams sent to Jacob later in the book of Genesis. Touching upon each phrase used to describe these dreams in scripture, Philo explains the symbolism. At this point in his examination of Jacob's dream of the ladder, Jacob spots a place to settle for the night, "for the sun was set." (Gen.28:11) Discussing the imagery surrounding the sun, Philo explains its symbolic likeness to God, "most brilliant and most radiant."<sup>11</sup> While in reality nothing is like God, Philo states, there are two things which human opinion has compared to God- the sun and the

soul. The soul's likeness to God is illustrated by Genesis 1:27; Philo compares the soul particularly to "God the lawgiver."<sup>12</sup> Other verses are called in to liken the soul to God, then Philo explains that the sun's likeness is illustrated through figurative language in the scriptures. In this use of the Genesis passage, therefore, Philo says that it is the soul which is in God's image- he does not differentiate the mind from the soul here although, as we will see, they are not, strictly, synonymous.

### II.B.Logos as archetype

Other examples of Philo's utilization of the "in God's image" passages use the text in more abstract philosophical observations. These relate not so much to details about God's image and technicalities of man's likeness to it, but to a theory concerning patterning and God's image as an archetype for that process. An intricate argument arises from these, concerning the meaning of archetype, a Platonic term, and of the logos, a term held in common by religious and philosophical language. An archetype is a first model, a blueprint, a pattern after which the other copies are made. In terms of this Genesis text and of humanity's creation, the Archetype would be whatever of God humans are the image of. The logos, first, is the transmitter of wisdom and knowledge about the divine. For Philo and other Jewish and Christian writers, the logos is also God's creative agent, as in John's gospel: "In the beginning was the Word [in Greek, logos], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ...all things were made through him." (John 1:1,3 RSV) A commentator on Philo explains of the logos, "As regards the World, he is ...the Archetypal Seal, the great Pattern according to

which all is made."<sup>13</sup> Several times Philo remarks that the text says not that man was made "the image of God" (eikona, he expresses in the Greek of the Septuagint), but "after the image of God" (kat' eikona).<sup>14</sup> This seems to broaden Philo's earlier observations, allowing him in these contexts to indicate many qualities which the human being possesses as being reflections of God's qualities, and allowing him to bring in the logos and explanations of its role in creation.

"Who is the Heir," a commentary on Gen.15:2-18, discusses at length the role of the logos in creation, explaining that the logos facilitates division within creation; here, for example, separating the sense-perception into real and illusory, speech into true and false and the soul into rational and irrational.<sup>15</sup> Here we see further into Philo's earlier comments concerning the soul and the mind. They are differentiated, and the logos is the instrument of that differentiation. The rational part of the soul, the mind, is left undivided. Interesting explanations follow, observing that Moses gives names to two forms of reason, "the mind within us and the mind above us."<sup>16</sup> The latter is God's reason, the logos, the "archetypal reason," and the former the "cast of that image"- our minds. So our souls are in the image of God, and our minds in the image of God's reason. Our minds are indivisible as the Godhead is indivisible, yet their task is always to divide, to perceive and classify; "for the Godhead is without mixture or infusion or parts and yet has become to the whole world the cause of mixture, infusion, division, and multiplicity of parts."<sup>17</sup>

The other references concerning the "in God's image" passages take the same position, using the argument concerning the "archetype" in

different ways. In "Noah's Work as a Planter," Philo points out in a discussion of the postures assigned to plants, beasts, and men, that man's erect stance is not, as "others" have claimed, due to his mind being a "particle of ethereal substance," and therefore man being somehow akin to the upper air.<sup>18</sup> Philo explains, quoting verse 27, that man was not made in the image of some created thing, but "after the image of the Archetype, the Word of the First Cause." Therefore it is only natural that man, cut from such an exalted pattern, would walk erect with eyes focused on heaven, "the purest portion of our universe."<sup>19</sup> The other examples follow suit; both in an early section of "On the Creation" and in book three of "Allegorical Interpretation," Philo speaks of the Image in terms of an archetype, God's exalted pattern in which humans were made.

#### II.C.Plural language

The plural language of Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man...", presents many problems for Philo. How does a monotheist account for this language? Philo scoffs at the idea that a creator who formed the lands and the seas unaided somehow required help to make "a creature so puny and perishable as man."<sup>20</sup> Cautioning that only God knows the truth of the matter, Philo counters such an assertion with this line of reasoning: among existing things some have to do with neither virtue nor vice (plants and animals devoid of reason), some with virtue only (heavenly bodies, which for Philo are endowed with life and mind), and others with both virtue and vice- they are of a mixed nature. Humanity falls into this latter category. God made the excellent, virtue-only things alone, as was proper, and the neither good nor bad things God

could and should make alone, as well. The creation of the good and bad things, though, the mixed nature creatures, was only appropriate to God for the making of their good parts, not their bad. Philo points out that it is only in relation to the creation of humans that God uses plural language- it does not occur in conjunction with the other creations. Philo uses this text to answer the question that plagues monotheists who claim a just god- where did evil originate? So "others from the number of His subordinates are held responsible for thoughts and deeds of a contrary sort: for it could not be that the Father should be the cause of an evil thing to His offspring."<sup>21</sup> Evidently Philo refers to some among the angels or "heavenly bodies"- the aid of these creatures would have been enlisted for humanity's less pleasant qualities to be created. The plural language, therefore, is God's method of addressing these other creatures and commencing the creation of humanity with their aid. Philo carefully avoids the sticky question of why humans had to have a mixed nature, and why God chose to enlist other creatures to make evil for man. Could not God have just created good people and left it at that? Philo leaves that question unvoiced and unanswered.

In shorter and more widely scattered passages, Philo also discusses the plural language used by God in verse 26- "let us make man in our image." Philo suggests in both these references, just as he did in his comprehensive treatment of the text in "On the Creation," that lieutenants or subordinants of God fashioned the parts of man liable to evil. There is no suggestion in these passages that those lieutenants are themselves anything but good- it would simply not be appropriate for God to create evil. In "On Flight and Finding," a continuation of his exegesis of Genesis, Philo comments that God created the rational parts

of the soul, his subordinates the "mortal" parts, "since He deemed it right that by the Sovereign should be wrought the sovereign faculty in the soul, the subject part being wrought by subjects."<sup>22</sup> In "The Confusion of Tongues," another Genesis commentary, Philo is discussing other scriptural texts in which God uses the plural. Cautioning the reader severely to put out of mind the possibility that God is not one, Philo elaborates again on the heavenly assistants. "Now the King may fitly hold converse with his powers and employ them to serve in matters which should not be consummated by God alone."<sup>23</sup> Philo discusses the plural language consistently and confidently, each time using the text to deny any plurality within the divine and to neatly disassociate the evil in man's nature from God.

#### II.D."Male and female"

Philo finishes his discussion of Genesis 1:26-27 in "On the Creation" with a remark about Moses having distinguished or differentiated the species with the comment "male and female he made them." This even though, Philo insists, "its individual members had not yet taken shape."<sup>24</sup> "For the primary species are in the genus to begin with, and reveal themselves in a mirror to those who have the faculty of keen vision."<sup>25</sup> These perplexing remarks are elaborated upon more clearly elsewhere. Two areas of inquiry arise- one concerning the idea that Genesis 1 describes one creation, and Genesis 2 another, different event. The other line of reasoning develops the first by exploring the differentiation of nature- genus into species.

##### II.D.1.Two creation stories

Philo explains his theory about the two creation stories- that they represent the creation of two different men. The first, the made-in-God's-image man, is linked to the Garden through an allegorical connection between the trees of the Garden and the virtues. This first man "having no part in perishable matter," is "endowed with a constitution of a purer and clearer kind."<sup>26</sup> As opposed to the man molded from clay, who needs warning and instruction and, nevertheless, soon fails at his task and is cast out, the man in God's image, the "pure mind," as Philo comes to call him, God places "among the virtues that have roots and put forth shoots, that he may till them and guard them."<sup>27</sup> The flesh and blood Adam is the second man, the one molded in Genesis 2; the man created in Genesis 1 is the ideal man, the one truly embodying a likeness of the Archetype.

#### II.D.2.Genus into species

The other line of argument arises from those puzzling words of his original interpretation in "On the Creation." Again mention is made of dividing the "genus mankind" into the species, by creating male and female. The context is clearer in this passage, and so is the explanation: "Thus God sharpened the edge of His all-cutting Word, and divided universal being, which before was without form or equality."<sup>28</sup> The lengthy discussion which follows that statement illustrates how features of the natural world (the oceans, time), animals, and even humanity were divided into equalities by the logos, enabling them to cease functioning as copies of an archetype and to begin functioning as particulars. The language of equality used here by Philo need not get feminists too hopeful; "Equality too divided the human being into man

and woman, two sections unequal indeed in strength, but quite equal as regards what was nature's urgent purpose, the reproduction of themselves in a third person."<sup>29</sup> So the earlier interpretation becomes less puzzling, and the role of the logos as archetype and as creative and divisive force becomes clearer, through this use of the Genesis text.

The bulk of Philo's discussions, therefore, center on humanity's having been made by and in the image of God, and on what that means. The particularities of human likeness, the origin of evil in human makeup, the process of creation and of the role of the logos in it- Philo finds explanations and illustrations of all these weighty topics in the text. The duality of the creation story itself, the retelling in Genesis 2 with its differences, is representative of a great deal to Philo. The tension between an ideal humanity and people as they exist, between the made-in-God's-image parts of people and the formed-from-mud parts, is a fundamental question which will concern Christian theology; for Philo's theology, these questions and their answers are integral parts of this Genesis text.

### III. Origen

Origen was a Christian exegete, also of Alexandria, who wrote near the end of the first century A.D. In one way, our examination of Origen's interpretation of the Genesis text will be much simpler than the discussion of Philo above, for Origen's only detailed exposition on the text occurs in the first of his homilies on Genesis. This look at that lengthy passage will be easier organizationally, then, but the subtleties of Origen's treatment of the text are far from simple. We may occasionally compare Origen's commentary with Philo's interpretations.



Philo is widely regarded as an influence on Origen's work and is frequently quoted by him; therefore, it may be profitable to see where Origen echoes an idea of Philo's or where he actively contradicts.<sup>30</sup>

One interesting difference which is immediately apparent upon reading Origen's interpretation is the more definite emphasis he places on layers of interpretation. Origen and Clement, and many later Christian writers, share this system with Philo, this concept that scripture has "body, soul, and spirit, a literal, moral, and allegorical sense."<sup>31</sup> Although Philo works within his own version of this system, distinguishing between the layers of meaning a text may carry and which must be explored, his allegorical interpretations flow effortlessly from the literal, so that the reader often has to double back, to check where the literal ended and the rather more imaginative allegorical began. Origen, however, keeps the layers more separate, continually referring to the "literal sense" or the "allegorical interpretation." For while Philo sometimes coasts along on one or the other, skimming through only the allegorical sense of a simple passage, or laboring at the literal meaning alone in a particularly difficult one, Origen maintains the layers consistently, sometimes at great length, often leaving the reader with the impression of a very skilled juggler.

### III.A. "Let us make"

Origen deals first with the language of creating used in Genesis 1:26. He points out that only heaven and earth, the sun, moon, and stars, and man are created by God- the rest are made at God's commandment. Origen uses this to recognize man's honor and greatness, "who is made equal to such great and distinguished elements."<sup>32</sup> No

mention is made of the plural language which so interested Philo. Quoting the "let us make man" passage, Origen immediately speaks of God's handiwork, evidently taking the plural for a "royal we". Origen labels something "more distinguished" about man's condition, something recorded for no other creature or creation- man is made in God's image.

### III.B. "Image of God"

A discussion of the allegorical meaning of that phrase follows. Origen insists that this man in God's image is not "corporeal," for the corporeal man is not "made" but "formed."<sup>33</sup> The made-in-God's-image man is, for Origen, the inner man, the "invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal" part of humanity. This is the basic theory put forth by Philo in the examples viewed earlier, but Philo's connection between that image-made man and humanity's inner person was less clear to me than Origen's carefully drawn scenario.

### III.C. Logos

Origen elaborates in another vein familiar from Philo's interpretation: man is made in the image of God, and the logos is the image in which man is made. Origen uses these terms as Philo does, but for Origen, of course, the logos is developed a step further than for Philo- the logos is also the Savior who came to earth as Jesus Christ. It was this inner likeness of man to logos which prompted the Savior's sacrifice; "for this reason our Savior, who is the image of God, moved with compassion for man who had been made according to his likeness, seeing him, his own image having been laid aside, to have put on the image of the evil one, he himself...assumed the image of man and came to

him."<sup>34</sup> Along these lines, Origen instructs that if through watching the devil man has become like him, losing the reflection of God, how much more, by contemplating God, can he be "transformed to his likeness."<sup>35</sup>

#### III.D. "Male and female"

Origen moves on to discuss the passage "male and female he made them," and he derives some interesting thoughts from it. First he says that the statement is made prematurely, for woman will not be created until the fleshly man is created in chapter 2. He decides that the statement is inserted so that the blessing which follows will make sense. Told to "increase and multiply," man might have disbelieved the divine lesson and asked in his own way Mary's question when told she would be the mother of the Savior, "How shall I know this, since I have not known a man?" Following this fanciful explanation is one congruent with Philo's interest in equalities, in genus and soul and speech being divided into harmonious parts. "Perhaps, because all things which have been made by God are said to be united and joined together, as heaven and earth...it might be shown that man also is a work of God and has not been brought forth without harmony or the appropriate conjunction."<sup>36</sup> These are Origen's explanations of the literal meaning.

Allegorically, the inner man consists of spirit and soul, which Origen likens respectively to male and female. If they get along and are happy, they "multiply by the very accord among themselves and they produce sons, good inclinations and understandings or useful thoughts, by which they fill the world and have dominion over it."<sup>37</sup> If the soul turns from the admonitions of the spirit and sins, however, the accord is ruined and sadness descends.

### III.E. Allegory in "dominion" passage

With his interpretation of the "dominion" passage of verse 26, Origen goes back to an idea he had elaborated upon in this homily just before he began his discussion of verses 26 and 27- the allegorical importance of the different created animals and man's rule over them. Interestingly, Philo said nothing about this aspect of the verse- his use of 26 consisted solely of the "in God's image" phrase. To back track a bit through Genesis 1, Origen had insisted that the waters represent our minds. When the mind is enlightened by Christ, the sun, it is instructed to bring out into the open its "creeping creatures" and "birds that fly"- that is, thoughts both evil and good. The birds flying into the heavens allow us to "explore in ourselves the meaning and plan of heavenly things as well as earthly."<sup>38</sup> The creeping creatures and, of all things, the great whales represent evil thoughts to be recognized and avoided. Asking how God could look at all these and say they are good when some are interpreted as evil, Origen says that opposition is good for the saints, and that dark things throw the bright ones into greater relief, making them more easily visible. Along these lines, the four-footed creatures which are created next represent the man of clay, "the impulses of our outer man."<sup>39</sup>

Continuing with Genesis 26, Origen explains that godly people have dominion over all these allegorical creatures, both good and evil, which spring up in men's hearts; these same things, though, themselves have dominion over weak and sinful men. Likewise the vegetation is allegorically understood as the "bodily affections."<sup>40</sup> Work and just anger are helpful offshoots, but anger and concupiscence are also

shoots, plants which must be kept back with care. Altogether, the allegorical interpretation seems to consist of a commandment to the inner man, the made-in-God's-image man: that person is ordered to have dominion over all the troubling, worrisome subordinates of this life.

Origen's allegorical elaborations upon the creation story are an example of the license this method may take in exploring a text's meaning. This allegory illustrates the presence of evil inclinations within humans. It is interesting that Origen uses the text to bring up these inclinations and offers no explanation for the evil's ultimate origin. Philo used the text to explain how evil was introduced into human makeup, but Origen expresses no interest in the topic.

Origen uses Genesis 1:26-28 to make other points familiar to us from Philo's work: man is made in God's image- not man's body, but the inner man; the logos is the pattern in which man is made; there are two creations, illustrated by the two creation stories- inner humanity is created in the first, corporeal humanity, distinguishable as the inner is not into male and female, is made in the second. Although he does not devote much attention to it, Origen's account of the two creations relies on an interesting detail- inner man is not differentiated into male or female- formation of bodies is required to make that distinction possible. Philo uses this part of the Genesis text to explain his theory of the logos as the divisive force in creation, separating rational and irrational, male and female. Though he comments that at the time Genesis 1:27 states "male and female he made them" the distinction did not actually exist, Philo, like Origen, does not use this as an opportunity to reflect upon a gender-neutral nature for the inner man.

## IV. Augustine

Augustine wrote at a significantly later time than Philo and Origen- around the end of the third century A.D. and the beginning of the fourth. Born in North Africa and educated on the Latin classics, Augustine was very much a citizen of the Roman empire; his style of writing gained an elegance and urbanity from his classical education.

Augustine set out to work on the creation story at least five times: in two books against the Manichees, in an unfinished "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis," in the last three books of his Confessions, in the huge completed version of On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, and in the eleventh book of City of God.<sup>41</sup> This is a voluminous amount of writing and a formidable amount of interpreting; it is also totally out of proportion to the amount of text Philo and Origen devoted to the verses. I wish to approach these works in a more selective manner than that with which we have examined the other two interpreters. Augustine's most systematic treatment of Genesis 1:26-27 is found in the unfinished "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis." I would like to discuss this interpretation point by point, then hit the high points of the remaining works. This will not be a thorough look at every aspect of Augustine's views on our text, but I will strive to offer a sampling of his most influential and oft-repeated interpretations.

## IV.A. "Let us make"

Augustine begins his look at Genesis 1:26-27 in "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis", not surprisingly, with the phrase "And God

said, Let us make man in our image and likeness..." Augustine points out that, according to the scripture, man was made on the same day as the beasts; here, however, the scripture text separates them "on account of the excellence of reason, according to which man is made in the image and likeness of God."<sup>42</sup> Augustine, too, points out that for other parts of the creation, God said "let there be made" or "let there be." One reason for the use of plural language only in the account of man's creation, he explains, is the Holy Spirit's desire to be part of the making-process of anything so excellent as human nature. He states further that the statement "let us make" is obviously addressed to whomever the earlier statements "let there be made" were addressed- the Son, the logos. Here Augustine quotes the third verse of John's gospel: "all things were made through him, and without him nothing was made." Augustine labors over whether the purpose of the statement, "let us make" is to illustrate that the Father helps to make this creation, humanity, when he did not help with the other creations. This explanation is unsatisfactory to him, so he concludes that the statement "Let us make man", with its troubling plurality, is included to instruct man, for whom scripture was created, that the Father participated in the making of all creation. That is, scripture was made for man, so in the scripture account of man's creation, the plural language is included as a special clue to man that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit participated in all creation. "And therefore, it now says, "Let us make," so that to man himself, for whose sake the scripture itself was made, it might be shown in himself that the Father also makes those things that the Son makes at the Father's bidding."<sup>43</sup>

## IV.B. "Image of God"

Next a complicated discussion of images and the nature of likeness commences. It is noteworthy that it is this matter of the "image" which provokes each of our interpreters to his most complex and subtle arguments. Augustine begins by explaining that although every image is like that of which it is an image, not everything which is like something is its image. "For it is an image only when it is derived from that other thing."<sup>44</sup> Why, then, Augustine queries, does the scripture say "in the image and likeness"? How could an image not be like? Or, he wonders, could like be one thing, and likeness another? He uses the examples of a chaste person and chastity, or a strong person and strength. And he talks of participation- chaste things are chaste by participation in chastity. "Hence, the likeness of God, through which all things were made, is properly said to be likeness, because it is not like by participation in some likeness, but is itself the first likeness, and whatever things God made through it are like by participation in it."<sup>45</sup> Clearly he is referring to the logos here- the logos is the first likeness through which men were made in God's image, and in whose likeness men participate to be in God's likeness. Without using the same language, Augustine is depicting the logos as Philo did, as an archetype by which humanity is made. All this discussion of the meaning of "likeness" and the definition of the logos as the "first likeness" seems to point to an argument essentially like Philo's.

It is not a simple argument, here in Augustine. He continues by adding that "to the image" and "to the likeness" are phrases which explain man's proper relation in all of this. The Son is the image; man is "after" or "in" the image, but is not himself the image. "In the



likeness" explains how man participates in God. "For if it only said, "likeness," it would not signify that it had its origin from him, and if it only said, "image," it would signify that it had its origin from him, but not that it was so like to him that it was not merely like, but likeness itself."<sup>46</sup> So the two ambiguous phrases, "in the image" and "in the likeness," explain with precision and intensity the nature of man's relation to God. Obviously, Augustine has spent much time discussing a single phrase of the text. This is not uncommon- his method is painstaking and literary, and his interpretations are very different to read as compared to Philo's and Origen's, even when they are saying much the same thing.

#### IV.C.Logos as "likeness"

A further discussion of likeness ensues at this point in "Literal Interpretation of Genesis." All things were made through the likeness of God (likeness is not capitalized here, but it seems we mean the personalized likeness, the first likeness- that is, the logos). This likeness has an awesome power of "imposing unity." Nature retains this "by parts like one another."<sup>47</sup> That refers, I think, to the numberless species of the earth- there are more than we can count, all different, and yet each is like itself. These things must be like one another to be themselves; "we can see and understand that they not only would not be with other things of their kind, but would not be individually in themselves, if they did not have parts like one another."<sup>48</sup> This is a little confusing. The main point, though, is that with all of this "like" out there in the world- all the unity imposed by the Likeness through whom all was made- only the rational

substance was made in the likeness. "All things were made through it [the likeness], but only the soul was made to it."<sup>49</sup>

Carrying this concept a bit further, Augustine remarks that the things man has in common with animals, while these may be beautiful, are relatively unimportant.<sup>50</sup> It is only that which man has in common with the divine, that truth through which man may participate and foster that "likeness," which lifts him above the rest of creation.

Augustine deals rather testily with the idea that man's erect stance signifies that his body is made to the likeness of God. His argument is reminiscent of Philo's. He agrees that the human body alone out of the animal world is not turned away from heaven, just as "likeness is not turned away from the Father"; in other ways, however, our bodies are unlike heaven, and "in that likeness which is the Son there cannot be anything unlike him to whom he is like. Whatever other things are like are also in some respect unlike, but the likeness itself is not unlike in any respect."<sup>51</sup> That is, despite our erect stance, there are obvious differences between our bodies and God, and in a true likeness there are no differences- therefore, our bodies are not made in the image of God.

Augustine ends this section (actually, ends this unfinished book) by restating more clearly, but with a slight discrepancy, what was said at greater length and with sometimes puzzling detail earlier. The likeness through which man was made can be understood as the logos, he explains, the Son, but man made in this image is not equal to or coeternal with that whose image it is- and would not have been, even had man not sinned. At slight variance with his earlier insistence that "to the image" meant the Son, who is the image, here all emphasis is on the

Trinity. "Thus we should not understand this as though God the Father made man to the image of God, that is of his Son. ...Scripture said 'God made man to the image of God,' as if to say, 'to his image which is the very Trinity.'"<sup>52</sup>

The issues brought up in the unfinished "On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis," then, are not new, but they are examined and explained quite differently from the other interpreters we've studied. Perhaps this is more remarkable, and not less, when we realize how similar Augustine's analysis of the text has actually been to Philo's and Origen's. The familiar issues have come up- the nature of God and of man made "in his image," and the kind of likeness man can have to the divine- and they have been resolved in markedly similar ways. In other works, however, Augustine draws some new meaning from these texts (or at least different meanings from the ones we've already examined) and makes some comments which are representative of the traces his interpretations will leave with the church.

#### IV.D. "Male and female"

##### 1. Two creation stories

The most interesting of these issues concerns men and women, and how the Genesis 1:26-27 text applies to them. In book three, chapter 22 of the completed On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis, Augustine wonders whether (in the words of the editor's subtitle) "Woman, in so far as she has a rational mind, is made to the image and likeness of God."<sup>53</sup> He starts by explaining that some have questioned whether God created only the spiritual, inner man at this point, with the molding of physical man coming sometime later (we know two, at least, who have so

theorized). "But they do not realize," he insists, "that there could have been no distinction of male and female except in relation to the body."<sup>54</sup> There is, therefore, no difference in the rational created substance of men and women. With that statement, he echoes Origen's interpretation of the two creations. He careens off this egalitarian line by recognizing a metaphor evidently common at the time, that the mind, in so far as it sometimes reflects on the high and immutable, and sometimes concerns itself with mundane tasks, is "made, in a sense, masculine and feminine, the masculine part as the planner, the feminine as the one that obeys."<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless Augustine continues to argue that the image of God is not found in this double function, but "in that part which is devoted to the contemplation of immutable truth."<sup>56</sup> He repeats Paul's words, "For a man...is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man." (I Cor.11:7, RSV) with the understanding that the phrase can only refer to the physical sense. "In the original creation of man, inasmuch as woman was a human being, she certainly had a mind, and a rational mind, and therefore she also was made to the image of God."<sup>57</sup>

#### IV.D.2.Things created potentially

Book six of the finished On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis is an attempt to reconcile the two narrative passages which relate the creation account: the one in Genesis 1 and the one in Genesis 2. He tries out the hypothesis that man was created on the sixth day of the original story, that the second story is just a recapitulation. The contradiction of man and woman having already been created simultaneously when the retold version has woman created from the

sleeping man, though, is too overwhelming to ignore. He decides that the second account must be more than a recapitulation. Somehow, the first time through God made everything; "All things together, He created potentially and in their causes works from which he rested on the seventh day."<sup>58</sup> Then, later, he works differently- the second account tells of "those beings which He creates in the course of time, working even yet."<sup>59</sup> Male and female were created on the sixth day, as Genesis 1 explains. They were placed "seminally" in the world, and from them all people would be made. Because of them, in time God would mold Adam from the mud and Eve from Adam's side. They were, Augustine insists, "the very same ones [persons] in one way then and in another way later."<sup>60</sup>

He spends some time explaining this interpretation, and this theory of things created potentially, in their causes. Apparently realizing either the cloudiness of his argument or the dullness of his average reader, Augustine leaves aside his half-hearted comparisons (to seeds: "there is indeed in seeds some likeness to what I am describing...but he [the critic] does not understand"<sup>61</sup>) and eventually admonishes the student "to believe Holy Scripture and accept its teaching...Scripture does not permit us to understand that in this manner [molded from mud] the man and the woman were made on the sixth day, and yet it does not allow us to assume that they were not made on the sixth day at all."<sup>62</sup> The point of this elaborate argument seems simply to be that there are two creation accounts because there were two creations. The first was of types or ideals, the second a process producing the corporeal world. This is similar to Philo's and Origen's arguments, although Augustine uses different language.

Notably, Augustine's line of reasoning does not so much add to the

interpretations given by Philo and Origen as illustrate them in a new way. Gone is the language of philosophy- Augustine never mentions an "archetype" here- and in its place is the literary, urbane style with which Augustine would reshape the world of interpretation. There is no sense here, at least, of an author trying to weld together disparate traditions, none of the feeling of juggling different meanings and different vocabularies. Augustine probes the language and nuances of the text with a sense of united purpose and singlemindedness sometimes missed in Origen and Philo. Nevertheless, through most of his discussion of Genesis 1:26-27, Augustine utilizes the arguments obviously proposed by interpreters before him- many of them we've seen in Philo and Origen. Notably missing are the allegorical explorations carried out by the other two interpreters. By sticking to the literal meaning and its immediate ramifications, Augustine defines the verse more than he explicates it; he tells you what the text means, while Philo and Origen merely suggest and point.

#### V. Conclusion

Actually, in the interpretations concerning the image of God and the nature of humanity's likeness to that image, the three interpreters say precisely the same things. Augustine's discussion of types or ideals, while the language is sometimes fuzzy, parallels Philo's contention that the logos, as the dividing, classifying source in creation, somehow distinguished the ideal and actual human. Philo, Origen, and Augustine all agree that the inclusion of the phrase, "male and female he created them" in Genesis 1 is an anachronism of sorts, since male and female could not be distinguished until the corporeal

bodies are formed in Genesis 2. Augustine and Philo take the opportunity to elaborate upon that fact and its ramifications, each including comments explaining that while the ideal, inner person is neither male nor female in nature, corporeal men and women are not equal. Origen lets the opportunity pass without further comments upon the differences between sexes.

The three interpreters are prompted to various conclusions by the plural language of God's "Let us make man" statement. Philo devises an elaborate scenario through which he explains the existence of evil in humans and divorces God from the creation of that evil. Origen and Augustine draw similar conclusions about the plural verb: that it indicates the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the process of creation. Augustine spends longer explaining the significance of this; Origen simply states that it is so.

Each interpreter then uses the text in a few other ways, to base other reflections upon, but the comments center upon the two areas mentioned above: the duality between ideal human/corporeal human, spirit/flesh, goodness-in-God's-image/evil-in-the-world, and the nature of God and of the created order as reflected in the plural language used in the story of human creation.

Interestingly, the topics mentioned in the introduction, the ones modern commentators tend to attach to the text, may or may not be seen in the ancient interpretations. Certainly feminists who find in the text a reflection of God's identity, who see in the plural language of verse 26 and the "male and female he created them" phrase of verse 27 a puzzling statement about the nature of the deity, are asking the same questions the ancient commentators ask. All are probing what the text

says about the nature of God and human likeness to God. When environmentalists use the text to question the proper relation between humanity and the natural world, to wonder what the dualism between spirit and flesh implies about the created natural order and the human place in it, they are puzzling over the same ambiguities Philo, Origen, and Augustine discuss. Origen's elaborate allegories concerning the previous animal and plant creations explore this very problem: how do we explain the other creations in relation to humanity?

It is hardly surprising that with two thousand years separating them, ancient and modern commentators find different answers to their questions. Perhaps it is more important to note that despite two thousand intervening years, they are looking at the same text, and asking the same questions.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Origen's doctrines concerning the Trinity, in particular, were called into question soon after his death. See Henry Chadwick, The Early Church, pp.100-115 for a concise account.

<sup>2</sup>A brief discussion of Neo-Platonic thought will be included in those sections. For further readings on Neo-Platonism, see Charles Bigg, The Christian Platonists of Alexandria, for an antique but simple and thorough discussion of Philo and Origen. On a more technical philosophical level, see Robert Berchman, From Philo to Origen: Middle Platonism in Transition.

<sup>3</sup>Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame, In.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964), 6.

<sup>4</sup>See Smalley, pp.22-23: "St. Augustine welded together these different elements into a philosophy of Bible study."

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>F.H. Colson, introduction to Works, by Philo, trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker, 10 vols., Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1929), x.

<sup>8</sup>Philo, vol.1, 55.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>11</sup>Philo, vol.5, 335.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>Bigg, 43.

<sup>14</sup>Philo, vol.4, 399.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 275.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 401.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Philo, vol.3, 223.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>Philo, vol.1, 57.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>22</sup>Philo, vol.5, 47.

<sup>23</sup>Philo, vol.4, 105.

<sup>24</sup>Philo, vol.1, 61.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Philo, vol.1, 205.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Philo, vol.4, 35.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 365.

<sup>30</sup>This does not assume that a contradiction on Origen's part represents an argument with Philo- simply that Philo's work, particularly on the creation story, was known by Origen, and that when the two differ, Origen would have been cognizant of that fact. See Smalley, 6.

<sup>31</sup>Smalley, 8.

<sup>32</sup>Origen, Homilies on Genesis and Exodus, trans. Ronald Heine, vol.71, The Fathers of the Church series, ed. Hermigild Dressler (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 63.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 67-68.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 68.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 69-70.

<sup>41</sup>Roland Teske, introduction to On Genesis, by Augustine, trans. Roland Teske, vol.84, The Fathers of the Church series, ed. Thomas Halton (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press of America, 1001), 3.

<sup>42</sup>Augustine, On Genesis, 183.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 184.

46Ibid.

47Ibid., 185.

48Ibid.

49Ibid., 186.

50Ibid., 185.

51Ibid., 187.

52Ibid., 188.

53Augustine, The Literal Meaning of Genesis, trans. John Taylor, 2 vols., Ancient Christian Writers series, eds. John Quasten and others, no.41 (New York: Newman Press, 1982), 98.

54Ibid.

55Ibid.

56Ibid., 99.

57Ibid.

58Ibid., 183.

59Ibid.

60Ibid., 184.

61Ibid., 185.

62Ibid.

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