

# The Judgment of Adam

Self-Consciousness and Normative Orientation in Lucas Cranach's Eden

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When it is stated in Genesis that God said to Adam, 'Only from the tree of knowledge of good and evil you must not eat,' it follows as a matter of course that Adam has not understood this word, for how could he understand the difference between good and evil when this distinction would follow as a consequence of the enjoyment of the fruit?

Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*

This is a paper about an old painting, an even older story, and a perennial philosophical problem. The story is the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; the painting is a work by the Northern Renaissance painter, Lucas Cranach the Elder. Cranach was painting five hundred years ago, at the height of the Protestant Reformation, at a time and place where the proper route to Christian salvation was the most pressing and fiercely disputed issue of the day. In the midst of these disputes the story of Adam and Eve became for a time a topic of intense scrutiny and controversy – among both theologians and painters. The immediate reason is not far to seek: if one is looking for a proper account of the prospects for man's salvation then one must surely begin with a clear understanding of the circumstances of his Fall. But while the issues I take up in what follows shall of necessity bear on theological questions, the problem I want to pursue is not so much theological but philosophical – and specifically phenomenological. I would like to consider what this old painting of this familiar story might show us about the structures of conscious experience, and in particular about the structure of self-consciousness in human acts of judgment.

Part of the motivation for my investigation comes from the suspicion that we operate with a rather partial and one-sided understanding both of the phenomena of self-consciousness and of the history of attempts to understand them. There is a tendency to think of self-consciousness as a characteristic theme of specifically *modern* philosophy – a theme inaugurated by Descartes, subjected to doubt by Hume, transcendentalized by Kant, and set out in social and historical terms by Hegel. This modern concern persists into recent times, particularly in connection with problems of self-reference and self-identification. But what about the history of self-consciousness *before* the modern

period? How was self-consciousness understood prior to the seductive Cartesian account which did so much to set the agenda for subsequent discussions? My hope and working hypothesis is that we might enrich our understanding of the *phenomena* of self-consciousness by recovering some of the history that has often been overlooked, and by investigating the range of problems and concerns that emerged there.

Once the project is set out in these terms, it should be obvious that the *Genesis* narrative will have to come in to our account. The Biblical account of Adam and Eve is, among other things, an attempt to recount the origin of shame. The narrative reaches its crisis at the moment when Adam and Eve suddenly become aware of their nakedness and accordingly feel the need to hide themselves. Shame, I believe, is a very fundamental form of self-consciousness; moreover it is an example of one of the constituent phenomena of self-consciousness that tends to be marginalized or overlooked in the standard history of the subject. The story of Adam and Eve is surely *the* central self-consciousness narrative in the pre-modern western world. So it makes sense to begin an alternate history more-or-less *in the beginning*.

But then why Cranach? The full answer to this question will have to emerge as we proceed. Part of the answer is that Cranach himself had a deep and continuing interest in Adam and Eve as a painterly theme. The standard Cranach catalog lists over thirty extant paintings on this subject, executed over a period of decades.<sup>1</sup> Several others are known to be lost or destroyed. If one adds in the woodcuts and surviving pen-and-ink drawings, the total rises to more than fifty. Astonishingly, there is very little duplication among these dozens of works. Among the major paintings no two are exactly alike, each exploring different moments in an unfolding tale or re-imagining the central figures and actions in a variety of different ways. This sort of sustained attention yields insight – at least when undertaken by a master of Cranach’s stature.

But there is another reason that Cranach’s paintings stand out among the hundreds or thousands of Adams and Eves in the standard western canon of fine art. Crucially, Cranach represents the scene in Eden as a circumstance that requires an act of *judgment*. Cranach seems to have been deeply concerned with the theme of judgment, and particularly in circumstances in which the task of judgment is forced upon us. The concern is perhaps understandable for a painter who lived out his life in the crucible of the Reformation. Cranach lived and painted in a world that was immersed in a deep crisis over true faith. And unlike other world-historical crises, where the outcome might be determined on the battlefield, or in the palace, or in the distant chamber of some deliberative council, this was a crisis that effectively demanded of every individual that he make up his own mind. Should I follow the teachings and practices of the established church or strike out in a radically new and uncharted theological direction? Here is a task of judgment from which there can be no escaping; moreover it is a

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<sup>1</sup> See Friedlander and Rosenberg (1978). Further references to this catalog are given with the abbreviation FR. According to Friedlander and Rosenberg, Cranach’s earliest painting of Adam and Eve (FR no. 43, Alte Pinakothek, Munich) dates from 1510-1512. Shade 1974 argues that the Warsaw *Adam and Eve* (FR no. 44 National Museum, Warsaw) is even earlier. A woodcut presently in the British Museum dates from 1509 (Campbell 2007, no. 12). Dating the last of the Cranachs is a matter of considerable difficulty because of the problem of distinguishing Cranach’s own works from that of his workshop. According to Friedländer and Rosenberg, Cranach continued to produce paintings on this theme as late as 1549.

judgment in which one's very salvation (to say nothing of the socio-political status quo) hangs in the balance.

I have elsewhere explored Cranach's famous series of paintings of the fateful *Judgment of Paris*.<sup>2</sup> In several of those works Mercury leans menacingly over Paris, pressing a staff to his breastplate, forcing him to pass his fateful judgment. In the Garden of Eden, Cranach also finds a circumstance of forced judgment, though in this case a deeply puzzling and paradoxical one. In many of Cranach's paintings of Eden we see his various Adams in a common pose: clutching an apple and scratching his head. What is he doing? He is thinking, or *trying to think* anyway. He is deliberating, deciding, trying to reach a judgment. A judgment about what? About whether to eat the fruit, in the first instance; about which way to go at this original existential crossroads. Sometimes Eve is handing him the apple; sometimes he is plucking it from the tree for himself; in a few cases Eve holds it directly to his mouth to feed him. And poor Adam is trying to decide what to do next. Like Paris he faces a forced judgment, and like Cranach's Paris he does not seem to be well-equipped for the task.

In order to appreciate the depth of Adam's problem, it is crucial to remind ourselves of exactly what Adam *lacks*. Recall the basic elements of his situation. God has set up the first couple in very comfortable surroundings. There are a number of crucial details about Eden that shall concern us, but the central fact concerns the one limit that God establishes for life in the garden. As it happens, the first divine commandment in *Genesis* is a dietary restriction: Adam and Eve are not to eat the fruit of one particular tree. Two trees are mentioned in the text: the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge. But there is at the outset no proscription against eating from the Tree of Life. (It is only *after the fall*, when Adam and Eve are expelled from garden, that they are denied access to that fruit.) So the original proscription applies *only* to the Tree of Knowledge. But even to call it the Tree of Knowledge is misleading. It is a tree of one particular kind of knowledge: *the knowledge of good and evil*.

And the Lord God commanded the man, 'You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.' *Genesis* 2: 16-17<sup>3</sup>

So what does Adam lack as he faces the task of judgment in Eden? He *seems* (I emphasize the qualification here, to which we shall have to return) to lack two things. He lacks self-consciousness, which emerges only as the outcome of the story. And he lacks knowledge of good and evil, which he obtains only as the result of eating the forbidden fruit. One of my main concerns in what follows is to understand the relation between these two deficiencies.

### §1 Three Problems

One way to make progress on big unmanageable themes is to look for theoretically tractable problems. So what are the problems or puzzles in this area? At least initially, I want to focus on three.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin 2006, ch. 5.

<sup>3</sup> For primary citations from *Genesis* I have used the third edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

*Adam's Ethical Problem:* The first problem is Adam's problem. He has to decide what to do. I call this an ethical problem because I think of ethics as being concerned very generally with the problem of knowing what to do. So what should Adam do? He's got God's command on one side; he's got the prompting of his wife on the other. He's got to choose between the two most important figures in his still-new life. And he's got to choose, among other things, between abstinence and indulgence, and between ignorance and knowledge. So what should he do? In posing this ethical problem we shall have to be careful to distinguish two different ways of posing the question. We can ask, from *our* perspective, what it would be best for Adam to do. But we also have to try to consider the question from Adam's perspective: given what *he* knows and given what he *lacks*, how should *he* go about deciding what to do?

*A Phenomenological Problem:* This brings us to the second problem – or rather: to a whole thicket of problems. For as we have seen, one of the crucial things that Adam seems to lack is knowledge of good and evil. This is part of what makes the ethical question for us so different from the ethical question for Adam. *We* have a rich and complex capacity to draw ethical distinctions, to orient ourselves in normative space. So when *we* think about Adam's ethical problem we bring all that normative orientation to the task. Hence *we* might say: he ought to refuse the apple, because God forbade it, and because he owes obedience to his creator. Or *we* might say: he ought to *eat* the apple, because knowledge of good and evil is itself a very fundamental good, and God's attempt to deprive him of that knowledge is itself a form of reprehensible enforced subjugation. And then, once both of these thoughts have occurred to us, we might go about the tricky business of trying to adjudicate between them. But of course neither of these thoughts can occur to Adam, if indeed he is deprived of the knowledge of good and evil. With this we confront a first version of the phenomenological problem, which we might initially formulate as follows: What can it be like to deliberate (to undertake to form a judgment about what to do) in the absence of self-consciousness and the normative orientation provided by knowledge of good and evil?

*A Theological Problem:* Some version of the phenomenological problem is my ultimate target here. But I propose to approach it indirectly -- in large part because I simply don't know how to approach it directly. My indirect approach takes me by way of a specifically theological problem, which in the end will occupy quite a lot of my attention. It will take some effort to find a suitably refined formulation of the theological problem, but we can start with some rough approximations. One might pose the puzzle in the context of God's curse on Adam and Eve (*Genesis* 3: 14-19). Here one might ask: how can such a spectacularly disproportionate punishment possibly be considered just? Or to put the point slightly differently, but in a way that really presses the issue: how could anyone who imposed such a punishment possibly be considered good? Yet another framing of the question might appeal to authorial strategy. Let's assume that Moses (using that name here as a convenient device for referring to the author or authors of *Genesis*) intended the story of the creation and the fall to establish, among other things, an account of God as worthy of respect, obedience and worship. Working with this assumption we can then ask, in effect, how the story was meant to succeed at this task, given what would seem to be a profound divine injustice perpetuated at the outset. But I am not satisfied with any

of these formulations, mainly because they all focus our attention on the issue of God's curse. The nub of the problem that shall concern me lies not in the punishment but in the original commandment. God *forbids* Adam from acquiring knowledge of good and evil! How can we make sense of *that*?

It is important to pause at this point in order to let this question sink in. For many of us, the story of Adam and Eve is one of those well-worn and utterly familiar stories about which we may never have had occasion to think very seriously. Or if we have thought about it seriously, our thinking may have focused on the spectacular act of creation, and then on the transgression, banishment, and irrecoverable loss. We tend to pass over the matter that crucially concerns me here. Even among serious and active believers within the Judeo-Christian tradition it is surprisingly common to find confusion over which fruit was actually forbidden. Among Cranach's own contemporaries, no less a figure than Erasmus makes a basic theological error on just this point. Addressing himself to the issue of Eve's temptation by the serpent, he writes:

In Eve obviously not only the will was weakened, but also reason and intellect, the fountain of all good or all evil. It seems that the snake succeeded in persuading her that the Lord's prohibition to eat *from the tree of life* was vain.<sup>4</sup>

But of course it was not the tree of life that was forbidden; it was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Or consider the case of St. John Chrysostom, an influential early Christian commentator on Genesis, and an important figure in the Eastern Orthodox church. His *Homilies on Genesis* (3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D.) provide a line-by-line commentary on the Eden narrative. Regarding the commandment at *Genesis 2:17* he writes simply, "No great difficulty in this instruction." But there *is* a great difficulty, and it is one that places enormous pressure both on our basic understanding of the Judeo-Christian God and on our understanding of the circumstance of Adam's judgment.

I realize that I am now treading on dangerous ground. I want to be clear that I don't intend to use these theological problems to mount some kind of challenge to Judeo-Christian theism. There is an obvious way in which they could be used to that end, but that is not my purpose here.<sup>5</sup> Instead I want to think about this from within the Judeo-Christian theological tradition. In that context (which is certainly the context from within Cranach paints) the theological challenge is to think through the puzzle, and to explore the various ways in which it might be approached, dismissed, or resolved.

In thinking about this, I find it useful to frame the issues as a theodicy problem. A traditional theodicy comprises a theology and a cosmology intended to reconcile the apparently inconsistent orthodox commitments concerning the existence of evil and the power and goodness of God. I shall not here be concerned with the problem of evil in the usual sense, but with a variant of the theodicy challenge that applies specifically to the story of Adam and Eve. The crucial link lies in the idea that the *Genesis* narrative, like the existence of evil, presents us with a certain kind of fundamental obstacle to comprehending the goodness, justice, and what we might call the worship-worthiness of God. Accordingly one is faced with the task, so to speak, of "justifying the ways of God to man or to (human) reason." And of course that is exactly the business of theodicy, traditionally understood. In

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<sup>4</sup> Erasmus, *The Free Will*, translation from Winter 2005: 20.

<sup>5</sup> For the idea that revealed religion must be assessed by applying a moral critique, see Fichte 1792.

the case of the *Genesis* narrative, the challenge is to propose an interpretation of the story which yields a worship-worthy God. The problem in this case is not so much that God *allows* evil to exist, but that God himself seems to *perpetrate an injustice*.<sup>6</sup>

But why exactly should the Eden story present a theodicy problem at all? I have already hinted at this, but it is worth trying to state the puzzle more explicitly. In doing so it helps to think about the events in Eden as a defense lawyer might. After all, doesn't the basic circumstance in Eden look suspiciously like a set-up? If only Adam and Eve had the benefit of good legal counsel, they could surely have had the whole case against them dismissed as entrapment. They were placed in the garden alongside the tree; they were given the command not to eat of it; *but they were specifically denied what they needed in order to recognize that eating from the tree would be a bad thing to do*. If they don't have knowledge of good and evil then surely they don't know what good is. In that case they cannot know that following God's commandments is good, so they can hardly be blamed for eating the fruit they found there. So how can God hold them responsible for doing what they did? Why would he have denied them exactly the knowledge they needed in order to navigate the circumstance in which he placed them? And if he did indeed hold them responsible in such a circumstance, how can we then think of such a God as just and good? These last questions may sound rhetorical but they are not meant to be. I want to take these as serious theological questions and think carefully about the options that are available for answering them.

I hope it is beginning to become clear that there is an important point of intersection between the theological problem and the phenomenological problem. If a bird eats the last fruit from my cherry tree I may be disappointed and even angry. I might decide on various measures to try to protect my fruit in the future. But it wouldn't really make sense for me to hold the bird *responsible* or to punish it for what it had done; it was just doing its birdish thing. If, on the contrary, my neighbor breaks into my garden to eat the last of my cherries, I hold *him* responsible. Why? Well it seems to me that the crucial fact about my neighbor is that he *decided* to do what he did. His action was an expression of his decision about what to do, and of his judgment about what is worth doing. By my measure that by itself brings him into the realm of ethical assessment, thereby engaging a range of reactive attitudes (to use Strawson's phrase<sup>7</sup>) that would be wholly inappropriate if applied to the bird. In just this way, the theological and phenomenological problems intersect. The intelligibility of God's stance toward Adam seems to presuppose that Adam's action itself is judgmental. If this is right then it seems that a solution to the theological problem must implicate the phenomenological problem. What can it be like

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<sup>6</sup> There is of course a long theological tradition which flatly refuses the challenge of theodicy. (The ways of God are mysterious to man.) My own view is that there are important limits to such refusals, perhaps particularly so in the context of the Reformation, with its prime directive to the Christian to read the sacred scriptures *for himself*. To read seriously is to grapple with the paradoxes and puzzles of the text, and to wonder what they mean; to read responsibly is to ask whether and how the God represented there is worthy of our recognition. Nonetheless, there may be those for whom the very asking of such questions is a form of impiety; this paper is not for them. There is another theological tradition which avoids the theodicy problem by simply denying the goodness of God – at least as concerns the God of *Genesis* and the earlier Semitic myths to which it is related. On this view the Mosaic God is primarily to be feared for his power, rather than respected for his moral goodness. I cannot join these debates here; both raise a host of serious ethical, theological, and hermeneutic questions that go beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Strawson (1963).

for Adam to deliberate, how can he undertake an ethical judgment, if he lacks self-consciousness and knowledge of good and evil?

## §2 Cranach's Adam and the Theodicy Problem

With this theoretical framework in hand I turn now to consider Cranach. I want to show that Cranach worries about these sorts of questions, and that in his paintings of Eden he explores some answers. In the first instance I propose to use Cranach to explore the theological problems, but my hope is then to use his work to leverage some insight on the phenomenological problems as well. In doing so my attention will center on one painting in particular: Cranach's 1526 painting of Adam and Eve, which since 1947 has been in the care of the Courtauld Institute in London. (See fig. 1) In what follows I shall refer to this work simply as 'the Courtauld Cranach' or 'the Courtauld *Adam and Eve*'.<sup>8</sup> In it we see Adam and Eve on a single wood panel, standing on either side of a very phallic tree. They are surrounded by a number of animals; the serpent hangs from the tree. At the center of the painting is the apple, already bitten, which Eve is handing to Adam, who is shown in Cranach's preferred pose, scratching his head and pondering his dilemma.

In thinking about Cranach's approach to the theodicy problem, the first thing to note is the way in which he makes the problem harder. As we have seen, a theodicy problem arises in this context because God holds Adam responsible for an ethical judgment that he must make without the cognitive capacities he would need in order to make it well. Cranach makes this problem harder by making Adam's fall seem like a foregone conclusion, perhaps even a necessity. Was it *ever* possible that Adam might have kept to his observance of God's command, given the way God had devised the circumstances? Cranach's rendering strongly suggests that the answer is no. The first hint of this comes in the look of bewilderment that Cranach gives to Adam. In sharp contrast to Eve, whose face clearly reflects her new-found state of knowing, Adam's expression seems to be one of bafflement. This is a theme that is explored in a number of Cranach's Eden paintings, where Adam is sometimes made to seem either bestial or infantile.<sup>9</sup> If Eve is knowing and alert, Adam has the look of someone is still waking up from a deep sleep. But what really seals Adam's fate here is the way in which Cranach renders Eve. In short, Eve is presented in such a way as to suggest a very strong allegiance with the serpent. The two share a common curving form, which was not at all standard in contemporary representations of Eve. And in Eve's eyes we can see an unmistakable echo of the shape of the eyes of the serpent. As we shall see again and again, part of the genius of the Courtauld Cranach lies in the subtlety of this sort of detail, but in a number of other works Cranach is *much* more explicit. In the

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<sup>8</sup> A very high resolution digital reproduction of the Courtauld Cranach has recently been made available as part of the Getty Center's online Cranach Comparison Study Tool. At this writing the tool can be accessed here: [http://www.getty.edu/museum/conservation/cranach\\_comparison/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/museum/conservation/cranach_comparison/index.html).

<sup>9</sup> An example of the bestial Adam can be seen in *Adam and Eve*, 1508-1510? (Musées des Beaux-Arts, Besançon; Brinkman and Dette 2007, no. 116); the best example of the infantile Adam is the lost pen and ink drawing of 1525-26, formerly at the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden (Campbell 2007, fig. 31).

Courtauld Cranach we see the woman as a kind of snake, but in a series of works Cranach presents the snake as a woman – with the upper body and head of a woman set atop the tail of a serpent.<sup>10</sup> In one particularly striking woodcut the two figures are virtually twins of one another (see fig. 2).<sup>11</sup> It should be clear that this makes Adam’s whole situation all the more dire. After all, Eve is his only companion, the only one with whom he might try to think through his decision. Moreover, the Biblical text makes much of how she is specifically introduced as a fitting companion for Adam, after he failed to find any suitable companion among all the other animals of Eden. So as Adam now faces this hideous and momentous decision, the deck seems utterly stacked against him: he lacks the knowledge and experience he desperately requires, and his one obvious ally and companion is in some kind of deep metaphysical alliance (or even identity) with the serpent.

Here we have come close to one of the heated theological debates of Cranach’s own time. For the idea that the Fall was necessary was in fact the position of one of Cranach’s closest friends, the godfather of his daughter, father of his godson, and the subject of several of his most famous portraits: the Protestant Reformer, Martin Luther. Luther himself wrote at great length on the Fall. At Wittenberg his lectures on *Genesis* went on for ten years, filling in the end thousands of manuscript pages. In the 1520s Luther was engaged in a heated public exchange with Erasmus, in which he argued uncompromisingly *against* the possibility of human free will.<sup>12</sup> Both in 1525 and in 1526 (the year of the Courtauld Cranach), Luther sat to have his portrait painted by his friend.<sup>13</sup> I imagine the conversation in that studio turning to a topic of deep common interest: the circumstance of Adam in Eden.

But I am in danger of veering off into fiction, so let me try to get back closer to the facts. At the very least we can say that Cranach makes our theodicy problem harder – or better: that he takes up Luther’s particularly hard framing of the challenge. God, it seems clear, has set Adam up for the Fall. He fails to supply Adam with knowledge of the difference between good and evil and he expressly forbids him from acquiring it for himself. And then, to make matters worse, he creates a companion who is deeply in league with the tempting serpent. Poor Adam doesn’t stand a chance. So how can Cranach possibly justify the ways of such a God to man? As a first step in tackling this question it will be useful to consider a crucial detail in Luther’s approach to this difficulty.

### §3 Luther and the Tree of Knowledge

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance the tableau of 1530: *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden; FR no. 202).

<sup>11</sup> Cranach, *The Fall of Man* 1523, (The British Museum; Campbell 2007, no. 13).

<sup>12</sup> The key texts are Erasmus, *De libero arbitrio* (1524) and Luther, *De servo arbitrio* (1525).

<sup>13</sup> Cranach produced portraits of Luther on many occasions and in a variety of media. At least one of the portraits (City Museum and Art Gallery, Bristol; Brinkman and Dette 1007, no. 40) is dated 1525, just a year before the Courtauld’s *Adam and Eve*. Several others are dated 1526 (examples: Wartburg Stiftung, Eisenach; National Museum, Stockholm). 1525 was also the year of Luther’s marriage, which Cranach commemorated with several joint portraits (FR nos. 187-190). Luther’s son was born in 1526; Cranach was the godfather.

In framing our theodicy problem I have placed the emphasis specifically on God's injunction to Adam: the prohibition against eating the forbidden fruit. And as we have seen, the problem gets its sharp edge because of the particular tree whose fruit God forbids. Suppose God had simply forbidden the eating of cherries, for instance. Adam would then have been denied a particular pleasure, to be sure; he would still have faced an ethical problem in deciding whether to obey his creator. But we wouldn't face the theodicy problem as we now face it. It is because the prohibition applies specifically to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that God's instruction seems tantamount to a *proscription on moral knowledge*. It is largely this implication that makes Adam's situation seem so dire – and makes God's design seem so perverse. It is interesting, then, that it is just this implication that Luther's account is carefully contrived to avoid. Let me briefly consider how this works in detail.

*Genesis* 2:9 is where we first hear of the two trees in Eden: "Also the tree of life was in the midst of Paradise, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." In his commentary on *Genesis*, Luther goes on at considerable length about this particular passage, starting with a surprisingly detailed excursus on the particular powers of the *first* tree: the tree of life. Remember that the fruit of the tree of life is *not* forbidden; according to Luther it plays a crucial role in sustaining Adam and Even in their life in the garden. Not only does it assure "a long and healthy life in a state of perpetual youth" (Luther, *Works* I, 93), it also provides a wide range of specific medicinal benefits. Luther himself is particularly interested in its powers as an aid to digestion. At one point he writes of Adam: "He would have eaten, he would have drunk; and the conversion of food in his body would have taken place -- but not in such a disgusting manner as now" (Luther, *Works* I, 92).

But what about the other tree, the crucial tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Luther's comments on this matter begin with an observation about its name. Whereas the tree of life took its name from the specific nutritional and medicinal properties associated with its fruit, Luther claims that the second tree took *its* name "*from the event with lay in the future.*"<sup>14</sup> The event which Luther has in mind is of course the event of the Fall. Here again it is crucial to keep our epistemic accounting straight. *We know* that the second tree was to be the site of the fateful transgression and expulsion. So *we know* the role that the tree was destined to play in Adam's initiation into moral knowledge. But of course *Adam* didn't know any of that at the outset; so the name only makes sense in retrospect. From this asymmetry in the matter of nomenclature, some rather significant consequences follow. In order to see them we will now need to think not just as defense lawyers but as semantic theorists.

Allow me to take a rather formal approach to this particular part of the problem. I want to make use of a semantic distinction between what I will call a *de dicto* and a *de re* imperative. To see the relevant distinction, let's briefly switch mythological traditions. Imagine a mother advising her son on matters of love and marriage. Perhaps her name is Jocasta. Let's suppose that Jocasta sits down with her son and instructs him, saying "Don't marry the first girl you meet." Here we have a

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<sup>14</sup> Luther, *Works* I, 93, emphasis added. Luther here cites Augustine in support of this claim, and on several other crucial details of his interpretation. See in particular *De Genesi ad litteram* (5<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.); for an English translation see Taylor 1982. Augustine's account of the tree of knowledge is found in Book 8.

*de dicto* imperative. Jocasta doesn't know *which* girl her son will meet first; but her imperative applies to that girl, whoever she turns out to be. But now suppose Jocasta goes on to tell her son: "And for heaven's sake, don't marry me!" In this case we have a *de re* imperative, since it applies to one particular woman, no matter what else may be true of her. The crucial thing is that the *de dicto* imperative specifies the forbidden object in virtue of a particular description that applies to it. The *de re* imperative specifies its object in a way that is independent of further description – in this case by indexical ostension.

With this semantic distinction in hand we can now construct two quite different versions of God's injunction about eating the forbidden fruit. In both cases the injunction applies to the same object, but that object is picked out in two quite different ways. Recall again the formulation at *Genesis 2:17*: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat[.]" On a *de dicto* interpretation, God's imperative applies to the tree in question in virtue of its being the tree that satisfies the relevant description. It is *precisely* because it is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that God's imperative applies to it. Understood as a *de re* imperative, however, the command applies to that tree no matter what kind of tree it is. Here it might help to imagine God and Adam, standing together in front of the tree; God points and says simply "Don't eat from *that tree*."<sup>15</sup> If he goes on to call it the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he uses this expression strictly as a proper name rather than as a reference-fixing definite description.

What I want to propose, then, is that on Luther's account of the name of the tree, God's imperative is best understood as a *de re* imperative. It really doesn't matter *what kind* of tree it is; all that matters is that God's commandment applies to it. The *de dicto* imperative is at best intelligible retrospectively, if Luther is right about the matter of its name. How does this help with our theodicy problem? The key thing is that on the *de re* interpretation of the imperative, we no longer have license for the implication that caused so much trouble, since God's command is *not* to be understood as a proscription on moral knowledge at all.

So why *did* God prohibit eating of this particular tree? To this Luther also has a brilliant answer. They *needed* that tree, he claims, every bit as much as they needed the tree of life. Why? *It was their temple* – a place where they could express their "worship and reverence toward God."<sup>16</sup> (Luther, *Works I*, 94) Luther:

[God] now builds him, as it were, a temple that he may worship Him and thank the God who has so kindly bestowed all these things on him. Today in our churches we have an altar for the administration of the Eucharist, and we have platforms or pulpits for teaching the people. These objects were built not only to meet a need but also to create a solemn atmosphere. But this tree of the knowledge of good and evil was Adam's church, altar, and pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, give recognition to the Word and will of God, and call upon God for aid against temptation. (Luther, *Works I*, 94-95)

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<sup>15</sup> One of Cranach's Eden tableaus seems to portray just such a divine ostension: *Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden* (Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden; FR no. 202).

<sup>16</sup> This claim was also central to Augustine's treatment of these matters.

In short, Adam worships God specifically through the exercise of his own restraint. Here it is crucial that Adam has *no reason* to abstain from the fruit save for the fact that God had prohibited its consumption.

I won't go further into the details of Luther's rather expansive discussion of these matters at this stage.<sup>17</sup> I want to return to consider two other aspects of his position below, but for now we have seen enough to recognize one crucial element of his approach to the theodicy problem – an element of which we shall find traces in Cranach's art. By itself, however, Luther's ingenious account of the tree cannot suffice to resolve the theodicy problem altogether. Certainly he takes some of the sharp edge off the challenge, by providing an escape from the particularly unpalatable idea that God's first commandment is to proscribe moral knowledge. But we are still left with a residual version of the puzzle, as long as we still allow that Adam gains his knowledge of good and evil only as a consequence of his transgression. Even on Luther's account, it is only when Adam eats from the tree that he gains his moral knowledge. That, after all, is how Luther thinks the tree got its name. But if Adam *gains* his moral knowledge upon eating the fruit, then surely he *lacked* it prior to his transgression. Theologically this is still a problem, since it means that God placed Adam in a grave circumstance requiring ethical judgment, yet failed to supply him with the knowledge he needed to understand his ethical challenge. Phenomenologically we are left with effectively the same problem as ever, insofar as Adam faces his momentous task of judgment *prior* to the acquisition of the self-consciousness and ethical knowledge that came about only as a consequence of his decision. So the question is: can we make sense of such an act of judgment? I turn now to Cranach to look for help with these matters.

#### §4 Cranach's Serpent

So what if anything does Cranach have to say or show about our theodicy problem? We have already seen the ways in which he makes the problem seem harder, emphasizing Adam's apparent incompetence, Eve's alliance with evil, and the seeming inevitability of the fall. But does he have any suggestions about how the problem might be solved? In broaching this question I want to start by thinking specifically about how Cranach *signs* his painting – the most direct and literal way in which he puts his own mark on the ancient story.

The first thing to note in this connection concerns the *placement* of Cranach's signature. In most of his other paintings Cranach follows the usual practice of placing his signature somewhere along the bottom margin of the canvas or panel. But in his paintings of Eden Cranach often takes a very different approach. In the earliest woodcut of Adam and Eve he identifies himself by showing his own personal coat of arms nailed to the tree of knowledge alongside the emblems of his patron – almost as if he were claiming the tree as a possession.<sup>18</sup> In the Courtauld Cranach the placement of the signature is more subtle but if anything even bolder: he shows his signature on the central stem of the

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<sup>17</sup> Certainly it merits much closer attention than I have been able to give it here. It is worth noting that Heidegger at one point singles out the third chapter of Luther's *Lectures on Genesis*, along with Kierkegaard's *The Concept of Anxiety*, as the texts that had provided the most penetrating accounts of the phenomenon of anxiety [*Angst*]. Martin Heidegger 1927, fn iv to Div. 1, ch 6.

<sup>18</sup> See Campbell 2007, no. 12.

tree of knowledge, just below the point where the branches spread out from the trunk. It is presented there almost as if Cranach himself had been present in Eden, and had managed to carve his graffiti directly into the bark of the forbidden tree. The second point to note about Cranach's signature concerns its form. Indeed in this instance we can only speak of a *signature* in the most literal sense of the word. Cranach does not sign the painting with his name, or even with his initials, but with his own stylized personal symbol. And what sign does he adopt? It is the sign of the serpent. (See fig. 3.)

Already in 1508 – shortly before Cranach's earliest surviving woodcut of Adam – Cranach had been formally granted the symbol of "a crowned and bat-winged serpent" to use as his personal heraldic symbol. In many (though by no means all) of his subsequent paintings, he uses it in place of his name to mark authorship of his works; eventually it would become the hallmark for his enormously successful workshop. In the context of a painting of Eden, however, the sign of the serpent takes on a special significance; as we have seen, Cranach goes out of his way to exploit it. To one of his pious contemporaries, and indeed even for us, it is disturbing, even shocking, to note that the painter of this work seems to ally himself so explicitly with the figure in the story associated with the devil and evil. Here is Cranach, in the guise of a serpent, carving his name on the sacred forbidden tree, aligning himself with the tempting snake, who hangs from the branches just above. Before thinking about just what this must mean, we should first recognize the ways in which Cranach uses the form of his serpent to tie together different elements of the picture. For once we are alerted to the form of Cranach's symbol, we begin to see it iterated elsewhere in the painting. Its form is in the snake itself, of course, which is itself echoed in Eve's lithe and curving form. But it is in Eve's hair that the serpentine form is perhaps most spectacular, and in which the formal connection to Cranach's symbol is most evident. The serpent that Cranach uses as his own emblem is quite stylized and simplified: a simple curved line, up and down and up again, with a few sparse lines to indicate wings and crown. This same curving form, in much the same rhythm and scale, is repeated over and over and over again in Eve's corkscrew hair. So Cranach shocks us – or at least he shocks me. Here is a presumably pious Christian, exploring this foundational Biblical story, but presenting it in a context that brings woman, the serpent, the painter and painting itself into a systematic symbolic alignment. To all appearances it is an alignment with evil. Now this alignment is not accidental, or so I want to argue, shocking though it may be. But neither does it represent a departure from Cranach's deeply Christian vision. Indeed I believe that it provides a crucial clue to his theodicy. Let me take these three points in turn.

The alignment is not accidental. There is relatively little direct information about the source or basis of Cranach's coat of arms. We do know that Cranach traveled to Nuremberg to be granted his heraldic letter in person by the Elector.<sup>19</sup> His armorial brevet – the document establishing his heraldic rights -- is dated January 8, 1508,<sup>20</sup> but traces of his experimentation with the symbol can be found much earlier.<sup>21</sup> Some scholars have speculated that the choice of emblem may have been connected

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<sup>19</sup> Campbell 2007: 10.

<sup>20</sup> Friedländer and Rosenberg 1978: 18.

<sup>21</sup> A particularly important case is the *Crucifixion* of 1502 (Metropolitan Museum, New York; Brinkman and Dette 2007, no. 7), which Cranach signs using an abstract angular symbol that (at least in retrospect) is a clear analog of the later serpent.

with Cranach's interests in alchemy. It is possible that Cranach's brazen association of his snake with the tree of knowledge was intended as a cryptic advertisement of his possession of forbidden and secret alchemical knowledge.<sup>22</sup> In the context of the *Genesis* narrative, however, the snake is of course the tempter, and also (at least by tradition) the deceiver. Here we should recognize that there is indeed an important sense in which Cranach -- now specifically as painter rather than as alchemist -- really is in deep allegiance with the snake. For of course the art of painting is itself an art of deception, making us see Eden where in fact there is only oily wood. And in Cranach's case it is a sort of seduction as well. Among his contemporaries, Cranach was celebrated for his sensuous human figures, and his rendering of the figures in Eden itself figures as a kind of seduction of the eye of the viewer. (In this connection it is instructive to contrast Cranach's rendering of Adam and Eve with that of his contemporary and rival, Albrecht Dürer. Dürer's figures seem designed to inspire; Cranach's to arouse.) In this sense, then, the alliance or symbolic allegiance of snake, woman and painter is perfectly apt. In the context of Cranach's theme and execution here, all three are seductive deceivers. Indeed we might even say that the technique of Cranach's signature serves to place the work in the long tradition of the allegory of painting: through his use of the serpent Cranach lets the painting make a point about the art of painting itself.

But nonetheless this alliance with the serpent does *not* represent a break from Cranach's deeply Christian allegiance. This was my second point. We can see this by following out the final iteration of the serpentine form in the painting. It is present not simply in Cranach's signature and in the snake, not simply in Eve's form and hair. We find it once again, albeit this time much less conspicuously, in the tendrils of the vine that grows up from the base of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. These tendrils, I want to suggest, form one of the keys to the painting. It is quite important, I believe, that they are *not* painted to be conspicuous. If one looks for serpentine forms in the painting, one will find them first in the serpent, then in Eve and her hair, later in Cranach's signature, and only finally in the tendrils of the vine. In this progression we can trace the cultivation of a problem and the proposing of a solution.

As we have seen, the centerpiece of Cranach's 1526 painting is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Its central stem provides the strong vertical center of the painting, dividing Adam from Eve. And of course the tree itself provides the setting for the action of the scene. Growing from the base of the tree Cranach places a robust vine, strong enough to stand and climb and sustain its own weight, though it is in full leaf and weighted down with large clusters of ripe grapes. One function of the vine is obvious: its leaves are strategically placed so as to preserve the modesty of the two figures, in the usual mode of the period. But in this case the vine has a further, unmistakable iconographic significance as well. In Cranach's world, a grape vine is immediately recognizable as a symbol of the Eucharist -- of the blood of Christ and the sacrament of holy communion. As we shall see in fuller detail below, this is one of a cascade of Christian references in the painting. While the setting of the

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<sup>22</sup> There is a small body of art historical scholarship that interprets Cranach's paintings as secret alchemical recipes. See for instance Nickel 1981.

story may derive from the Judaic Torah, Cranach's rendering of the scene – and, I shall argue, his solution to the theological problems it presents – is unmistakably Christian.

What place does this reference to the Eucharist have in the theological structure of the painting? The basic answer is fairly straightforward. The vine here is a reference to the blood of Christ, and to the wine drunk at holy communion. (Recall here Luther's point about the tree as Adam's alter.) In this way it refers to the so-called "new covenant" -- the new deal between God and Man marked by Christ's death and resurrection. The painting itself is a representation of the old covenant – or perhaps we should say instead: the *original* covenant. We can think of a covenant as an agreement or promise or contract governing the relation between God and man. In the Old Testament account of the wanderings of the tribe of Israel, the basis of the covenant is God's law (*torah*), as given to Moses. God promises the Israelites protection and guidance and a homeland; in exchange he demands that they conform to the Mosaic Law. But of course the Mosaic covenant is not yet part of the story in *Genesis*. In Eden man's relation to God is governed by a prior covenant. God creates man, provides him with the Garden, and creates a partner for him; but he also makes demands on his human creations, conditions governing their life in Paradise.

Once we express the circumstances in these terms, we can also formulate a revised statement of our original theological difficulty. The basic theological problem is that this original covenant is a bum deal, since Adam has been created without the basic cognitive and ethical capacities that are needed in order to keep to his side of the bargain. What does Cranach have to say about this? His solution comes into view precisely when we follow the traces of his own personal emblem – from signature to snake to woman to tendril. From the very tree which marks the terms of the original covenant springs a plain sign of the new covenant to come. From a Christian perspective that new Covenant is *required*, for the original covenant placed an impossible demand on human beings, given their distinctive nature as they had been created. I propose that we see the theology of the Courtauld Cranach in exactly these terms: as a visual rendering of the Christian new covenant as a fulfillment of an original covenant that was impossibly flawed when considered in isolation from that subsequent fulfillment.

Once we approach the painting in these terms we can see that the whole work is – unsurprisingly – saturated with Christian imagery. Here is a first level where the animals must come into our analysis. Start with their number. If we set aside the serpent, there are twelve of them: four birds and eight mammals. The choice of animals is laden with significance and is the subject of much discussion; their placement is also of considerable importance. Without entering into some of the more speculative aspects of this sort of analysis, a few observations are worth making. The number of the animals makes clear reference to Christian theology. Twelve was of course the number of Christ's disciples; so to cast Adam alongside twelve companions is to echo a standard thought of Medieval Christianity – that Christ was the "new Adam." One of the twelve is black, a reference to Christ's betrayal by Judas. Among the animals we find a lamb and a lion – a standard symbol for the Christian hope for peace. There is the stag front and left – a position of intimacy in a painting, and a traditional emblem of Christ. The lamb itself comes into direct relation with the stag, whose fearsome antlers

threaten both Adam's genitals and the neck of the lamb. Here recall that the lamb is another a symbol of Christ, and a reminder of the blood sacrifice. The most distant animal, far back and to the right, is a white horse emerging from the thicket. Although I have seen no explicit discussion of this point in the iconographic literature on the painting, this seems to me a plain reference to Christ's resurrection, as a white (blameless) animal emerges from bushes (tomb). Its right front leg is raised implausibly high – an odd gesture that only makes sense iconographically. In the picture plane the white hoof is raised immediately above the body of an ominous black boar: the risen Christ conquering Satan and evil. The placement of the white horse itself has a dramatic formal effect on the work as a whole, for it gives the whole image a depth of field that it otherwise lacks, with the other figures – both human and animal – pressed up against the front of the scene. Within the theological framework that we can now see emerging, this spatial distance signifies a temporal distance. For the events which will fulfill the action in the foreground lie in a still distant future. In sum: the array of animals is carefully contrived so as to embed the Hebrew story of the Fall in a thoroughly Christian context, and in this way to propose an essentially Christian solution to our theodicy problem. In short, we can only understand the events in Eden by remembering that they mark the beginning of a long story; God's goodness and mercy become visible only when we consider the whole arc of the Judeo-Christian narrative.

It is not my purpose here to assess the theological adequacy of this Christian approach to the theodicy problem, nor to follow out the many further theological and ethical questions it raises. What matters for now is to recognize that and how Cranach engages the theodicy problem and constructs the painting so as to explore a solution. But even if we allow that Cranach has shown us a vision of divine justice by this device, we are still left to wonder about poor Adam. Where does Cranach's grand Christian narrative leave him?

## §5 Ontological Self-Consciousness

Up to this point we have been focusing mainly on theological issues raised by Cranach's painting, but I want now to tackle some of the phenomenological problems as well. How (if at all) can we make sense of Adam's fateful judgment *as an experience*? And what (if anything) does Cranach's painting show us about this matter? I propose to start on these questions by considering not Adam himself, but the natural setting of Adam's judgment as Cranach portrays it. Here it is crucial to notice something of which Cranach's painting insistently reminds us, namely that the events in Eden were events not only in the history of man but in the history of nature. By this I mean that the events of the Fall were to have consequences not only for *human* existence (and for man's relationship to God) but also for the being of nature itself. This is a point that figures in the text of *Genesis*, particularly in the framing of the curse. Recall that when God comes to pronounce his punishment he curses not only Adam and Eve (the transgressors) and the serpent (the tempter); he also curses the earth itself. "*Cursed is the ground because of you; ... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you*" (*Genesis* 17-18, emphasis added). In introducing thorns and thistles, God is not simply adding a few extra species to

his flora. Weeds were not simply *absent* in pre-lapsarian Eden; they were ontologically impossible. Nothing in Eden could have been a weed, given that the plant world as a whole was good without qualification (*Genesis* 1:12) and had been blessed specifically for fulfilling the needs of the creatures who dwelt there (*Genesis* 1:29). But if nature had hitherto been a bountiful and beneficent domain, now it is to be hostile territory which must be battled and subdued in order to reap a harvest. Thorns and thistles can well serve as the emblem for this new ontological order in the natural world.<sup>23</sup>

How does this transformation of nature figure in Cranach's vision? When we look closely, we see that he explores it quite systematically. We see one trace of it in the color of the sky, which shows the familiar hues of nature in transformation. But it is in Cranach's animals that this transformation in the natural order is explored most subtly and fruitfully. For the moment I propose to concentrate on one animal in particular: Cranach's lion.

Cranach himself had never seen a lion in person, but lions figure in several of his paintings of Eden, and in a number of other works besides. In the medieval bestiaries, the lion is always the most important animal – the king of the beasts. But more importantly for our purposes the lion is by nature a carnivore, a predator, a hunter. His whole nature, the traits that befit him, the distinctive forms of endeavor and excellence and pleasure appropriate to him . . . , all this is organized around the task of the hunt, the kill, the eating of fresh, still-warm meat. But what about lions in Eden? Are we to imagine them chasing down a deer and tearing it limb from limb, leaving the carcass for a host of lesser animals and scavengers? Certainly not in Cranach's accounting. As we have already seen, in Cranach's paradise, the lamb can lie down with the lion; the deer can drink quietly and utterly without fear from the pond where the lion lurks nearby. The stag sits with his rack of antlers, undisturbed by the presence of his natural predator immediately at hand. In all this we find the strangely unnatural circumstance of Eden; we also find an important part of the structural tension in Cranach's composition. For of course all this is about to be shattered. The peaceful coexistence is about to change. For now, Adam is scratching his head, but as soon as he bites all the rules will be changed; the result will be a transformation of what nature is, a transformation in the being of nature.

But the key point I want from all this concerns not so much the being of nature in general but rather the very specific being of the lion. *For the lion knows*. Among all the animals in Cranach's Eden, the lion knows what is about to happen – and he is *ready*. He may be lying – or only half lying, half crouching – but he is not at rest. And for the lion, we can now see, this immanent change in the order of nature is a change for the good – for *his* good, for the good of him, given the sort of thing that he is. Think about it: for a hunter, for a predator, for the carnivorous consumer of still-warm meat . . . , well . . . *Eden is hell!* The lion has *not* been able to live according to his distinctive nature; he has *not* been able to exercise the forms of activity befitting the kind of being that he is; he has been denied the things that are appropriate for him. And what has he had to eat? Grass? A few leaves? Fruit? Not even a lousy lizard or bug! (The text of *Genesis* is quite explicit in specifying that the animals in Eden

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<sup>23</sup> On the ontology of weeds, see Pollan 1991.

are to be vegetarians.<sup>24</sup>) Indeed now that we think about it, doesn't Cranach's lion look a bit on the gaunt side? Isn't he hungry? Deeply, essentially, metaphysically hungry? But not for long. As soon as Adam takes a bite from that apple the whole order of nature will change. And there, right there..., is a plump, unknowing and ever-so-tasty-looking doe: the lion's first solid meal since creation. Notice the lion's gleaming eyes; notice his paws: rear legs poised for the leap, front claws extended, scratching at the ground, head down, waiting for the release for his constraints. Cranach may not have had first-hand experience of lions, but he certainly knew the look of a housecat readying to pounce. (See fig. 4 for a later, more explicit rendering of the lion along these lines.)

Suppose we accept this. The theological transformation brought by Adam's act has consequences for the animals; it is an event in the history of nature; it brings about an ontological transformation; it is good for the lion. How does any of this help with the phenomenological or theological problems from which we began? Allow me to make what may seem an extravagant suggestion. Haven't we in effect just attributed a certain kind of self-consciousness to Cranach's lion? Hasn't Cranach showed us a lion who is in some sense aware of itself, of what kind of being it is, and who accordingly knows exactly what it should do with a plump doe just within claw's reach? I broach these thoughts in the form of questions, since I want to be careful not to make anything in my argument depend on a particular answer to them. But let's suppose for a moment that we think of the lion as possessed of a certain kind of self-consciousness. What kind of self-consciousness would it have to be? It is not the kind of self-consciousness that will shortly accrue to Adam and Eve; the lion certainly does not know that it is naked and it shows no sign of shame! Nor is the thought that the lion is possessed of the kind of psychological self-presence that would concern the later Cartesian tradition. The form of self-consciousness that is relevant here is what I propose to call *ontological self-consciousness*. As a first attempt, let me define this term as follows: to be ontologically self-conscious is to have a distinctive kind of awareness of one's own being -- in particular an awareness of the kind of being one is and about what is good (what is fitting) for a being like that. Notice here that ontological self-consciousness and normative orientation go hand in hand, thus suggesting a possible link between Adam's twin deficiencies.

Once we are attuned to ontological self-consciousness we can recognize that it is very much in play in pre-lapsarian Eden. Cranach's lion has it, I submit; but more importantly: so does Adam. The evidence for this comes from Adam himself, particularly in the words he utters in his pre-lapsarian state. *Genesis* reports only one speech by Adam prior to the fall, in the final verses of *Genesis* 2. God says at Gen 2:18 that it is not good for man to be alone, and announces his plan to "make a fitting helper for him." At verses 19 and 20 God then creates the animals (in this version of the story their creation comes *after* the creation of Adam), bringing each to Adam, who names them. But no fitting

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<sup>24</sup> *Genesis* 1: 29-30: "God said, 'See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.'"

helper is found. Verses 21 and 22 then report on the creation of Eve. It is at *Genesis 2:23* that we find the only words attributed directly to pre-lapsarian Adam. And what does he say?

This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of man this one was taken.

This is a passage of considerable importance for my purposes, since in Adam's own speech we can expect to find some hints about his original condition, and in particular about just what he knew prior to eating the apple. And what does he know? He knows, first, what kind of thing he is – for it is only in virtue of this knowledge that he can recognize Eve as belonging to that same kind. And second, this pre-lapsarian knowledge provides him with normative orientation. In particular, it provides him with the orientation he needs in order to recognize both that none among the other animals would make fitting helpmates for him, but that Eve *is* a fitting mate. So Adam, even *before the fall*, is represented as ontologically self-conscious: he is aware of the kind of being he is, and he finds himself with a normative orientation grounded in that self-awareness.

One might suppose that we are here within reach of solutions to the problems with which we began. Recall in particular that our theodicy problem received its sting from the thought that God failed to provide Adam with moral knowledge -- or even actively proscribed its acquisition. It was this same thought that made the phenomenological problem seem so vexing: what can it be like to pass judgment on a matter such as this without the benefit of self-consciousness and the normative orientation provided by knowledge of good and evil? But if we take into account Adam's ontological self-consciousness then these problems may admit of resolution. *If* God had failed to provide Adam with ethical knowledge then his treatment of him would have been grossly unjust. But by making Adam ontologically self-conscious he provided him with a very fundamental and powerful form of normative orientation – even if he did not burden him with the explicit and direct experience of good and evil that would come in the wake of the Fall. The lion, in knowing what kind of thing *he* is, can recognize suitable prey and knows the appropriate thing to do with it; Adam, in knowing what kind of thing *he* is, recognizes Eve as a good (fitting, appropriate) mate. So perhaps Adam's pre-lapsarian self-consciousness also suffices for recognizing the majesty of God when brought face to face with *it*, and so for knowing immediately that it is good (fitting, appropriate) for him to obey divine commandments. With this solution to the theodicy problem we might also find a model for thinking about the phenomenology of pre-lapsarian judgment. Adam's ontological self-consciousness gives him a capacity to discriminate and choose appropriately among the options that are presented to him; that much is clear from his discrimination of Eve from among all the potential mates with which he is presented. But as an act of judgment this is not unlike a lion's choice of prey. Both the lion and Adam are endowed with an innate ability to recognize what is fitting for them and to be drawn toward such things in an appropriate manner. In so doing they answer the challenge of choice by relying on a primitive and visceral discriminating response to their environment: *here is something fitting for me, given the kind of thing that I am.*

But we must beware of moving too quickly here; for at least two obstacles stand in the way of this sort of solution. A first problem concerns the adequacy of ontological self-consciousness for the distinctive sort of deliberative circumstance Adam now faces. After all, we don't normally think of lions as being capable of *judgment*, even if they can discriminate and choose appropriate prey while hunting. And part of what seems to be lacking is the capacity to reflect and adjudicate between deeply conflicting considerations and interests. Yet it is just such a conflict with which Adam finds himself confronted. Here it is significant that Adam's pre-lapsarian exercise of ontological self-consciousness comes in the context of an essentially animal choice: the recognition of an organism in his environment as the right sort of thing to have as a mate. A hungry lion sees a fitting doe within reach and so pounces; a lonely Adam recognizes a fitting mate and so bonds with her. In both cases the choices are fitting, and grounded in a sense (however inchoate) of the kind or way of being of the one who discriminates. But it is far from clear that the primitive ethical orientation and self-knowledge that underwrites these choices can suffice to navigate the vexing ethical problem about the apple. In this way both the theodicy problem and the phenomenological question reassert themselves.

But there is also a second problem that comes into play if we try to follow this lead in coming to terms with Cranach's painting as a whole. To this point I have been assuming that Adam must be endowed with at least as much self-knowledge and normative orientation as that which we find in the lion. But it is far from clear that this is how Cranach himself sees it. Indeed arguably Cranach's Adam is decidedly worse off than the animals of Eden when it comes to self-consciousness and moral knowledge. Consider first the placement of the animals. Cranach's lion, as we have seen, shows signs of self-knowledge and basic ethical knowledge; but by his position he is associated with the figure of Eve, who has already eaten from the forbidden fruit. The other animals closest to Eve are the pair of roe deer and the two wading birds. These four animals are all arrayed around a pond or puddle, from which one of the deer is drinking. The puddle reflects the eye of the deer, in a striking visual trope for self-consciousness. And of course wading birds spend much of their waking lives gazing into the water. So in the animals most closely associated with Eve, Cranach again and again reinforces the theme of the reflective self. When we look to Adam's side of the tree, by contrast, we see that the puddle is dry and unreflective, and that these tropes of self-consciousness are absent. On this basis we might well take Cranach to be *contrasting* Adam and the lion precisely where we had been relying on their ontological similarity.<sup>25</sup> This suggestion is borne out if we undertake a systematic survey of the eyes in Cranach's painting – a task that can now be carried out with considerable sophistication using the Getty's Cranach Comparison Study Tool.<sup>26</sup> What emerges is a striking asymmetry. With the exception of Adam, all the eyes in the painting are rendered so as to show a reflection of light in the iris. The effect is most striking in Eve, where the reflection, rather anomalously, shows the mortise and transom of a lighted window. But the same device of bright white paint set against a dark background can be found in the eyes of the lion, the deer, even the birds and the distant horse. Adam's irises, by

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<sup>25</sup> I am grateful to Beatrice Han-Pile for pressing this line of objection.

<sup>26</sup> See fn 8, above.

contrast, are utterly dark, reflecting no light whatsoever. Once again Cranach would seem to be *contrasting* Eve and the knowing animals with the unknowing Adam. So while the lion may indeed know what he is and what he should get up to, Cranach's Adam seems utterly bereft. Indeed the more one studies the painting the more this comes to seem his most fundamental feature.

But I don't mean to suggest that this line of interpretation is itself bereft, and in what follows I want to argue that ontological self-consciousness is indeed at the heart of Cranach's concerns in the painting. Indeed – though I shall not be able to argue for this here – I think that ontological self-consciousness is the major form of self-consciousness that concerned pre-modern traditions. But if we are to develop this approach to Cranach's painting then we need to know more about the distinctive mode of being of pre-lapsarian Adam.

## §6 Two Lutheran Controversies

Before coming to my conclusion I want to exploit two further leads from Luther. Both emerge in the context of very high profile controversies in the period immediately prior to Cranach's composition of the Courtauld *Adam and Eve*. One concerns matters in what we can broadly call Luther's aesthetic theory; the second bears quite directly on the issue of self-consciousness.

It was in 1522 that Luther emerged from the so-called Wartburg Captivity – the period during which he lived in hiding in Wartburg Castle following his condemnation by the Diet of Worms. The year in Wartburg Castle was an intensely productive one for Luther; it was there, among other things, that he produced his ground-breaking German translation of the New Testament. During this time Luther and Cranach remained in close contact. One of Cranach's most famous portraits dates to this period, with Luther portrayed in his bearded alter-identity as Junker Jörg.<sup>27</sup> When Luther's New Testament was published in September of 1522, the Book of Revelation was illustrated with a series of Cranach woodcuts. But during Luther's absence there was a period of intense civil unrest in Wittenberg, as radical elements in the Reform movement, taking up ideas from Luther's own earlier writings and sermons, moved in increasingly radical directions. The Winter of 1522 in particular saw a series of riotous iconoclastic mobs, traveling from church to church destroying images and icons, including (much to Luther's horror) crucifixes. There was a very real sense in which the reform movement threatened at this point to turn into utter anarchy, just as the Catholic authorities had long warned. It was word of this chaos that brought Luther out of hiding. Upon his return to Wittenberg he delivered eight sermons over the course of eight days – the so-called *Invocavit Sermons*.<sup>28</sup> Given the circumstances it is unthinkable that anyone of any standing in Wittenberg could have ignored what Luther had to say. Given the nature of their friendship and collaboration, it is all-but-certain that Cranach himself was in the congregation. Once again in 1525 there was an outbreak of violent

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<sup>27</sup> *Martin Luther as Junker Jörg, Disguised as a Country Squire* (Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig; FR no. 148.)

<sup>28</sup> Martin Luther, *Eight Sermons at Wittenberg* (1522); *Werke* 10/3:1-64; translation in Tappert 2007: II, 231-265.

iconoclasm, this time led by an erstwhile follower of Luther's, Andreas von Bodenstein Karlstadt. This time Luther replied with an intensely polemical work entitled, *Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments*.<sup>29</sup> Given that one of the central issues at stake concerned Cranach's own professional activities (the representation of God!) we can safely assume that Cranach knew *exactly* what Luther had to say on that occasion as well.

It is in the context of the iconoclastic controversy that Luther found himself forced to take up broadly aesthetic issues – about the nature of aesthetic experience, about the character of artistic representation, and of course on the central disputed issue concerning the morality of artistic production. In doing so he sought to carve out a moderate position, a third way between the purported idolatry of Catholic aesthetic practice and the radical iconoclasm of some of his admirers and followers. For obvious reasons, much of the dispute centered on the proper interpretation of the Second Commandment:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (*Exodus* 20:4)<sup>30</sup>

Karlstadt and his iconoclastic followers argued that the commandment was unambiguous and uncompromising in its banning of images. But Luther insisted that the Second Commandment does not mean quite what it may seem to mean, arguing that what is properly banned is not the *making* but only the *worship* of images.

Two points in the dispute are relevant for our purposes. The first, interestingly, concerns serpents. For a crucial part of Luther's argument, indeed in many ways the final nail designed to close out his case, concerns the so-called brazen serpent described in *Numbers*, chapter 21. In the course of their wanderings, the Israelites are at this point besieged by serpents, sent by God in punishment for their complaining. The serpents bite the people, and many die. The Israelites seek help from Moses, who sets up a brazen serpent on a rod. The crucial passage is *Numbers* 21:8: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Make a seraph figure and mount it on a standard. And if anyone who is bitten looks at it, he shall recover.'" It is not entirely clear exactly what a seraph is, but by tradition it is understood that Moses erects a bronze serpent on the sort of pole that would be used to carry a battle standard. In the iconoclastic controversy this passage is of obvious importance, and Luther argues convincingly that the ban on images must be read in such a way as to make sense of this episode. If God here *commands* Moses to make a graven image, then the Second Commandment cannot be quite as straightforward and complete a ban as the iconoclasts make out.

The issue of iconoclasm was both dangerous and persistent in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and Luther accordingly finds that he must return to it again and again. When he does so he repeatedly adverts to this story of the brazen serpent, which he sees both as a refutation of the iconoclast's radical position and also as an important link between the Old and New Testaments.<sup>31</sup> But from what we have said so

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<sup>29</sup> *Werke* 18:62-214; translation in Tappert III: 151-302.

<sup>30</sup> I have followed the familiar King James translation for this passage.

<sup>31</sup> For some specific examples of Luther's appeal to the brazen serpent, see the third of the *Eight Sermons at Wittenberg* (1522) and the first main section of *Against the Heavenly Prophets* (1525). On the broader theological

far it should be clear that it bears on the interpretation of the Cranach's *Adam and Eve* as well. For Cranach in 1526, iconoclasm was a palpable threat – both to his increasingly successful business and perhaps even to his personal safety. In such a context the image of a serpent mounted on a pole (tree) serves as potent emblem: it is a reference to Luther's argument (which at that point had been recently and emphatically restated in *Against the Heavenly Prophets*) and it is a symbol of the legitimacy of the artistic enterprise, even in the face of the ongoing violent attacks upon it. So we need to add one more point about Cranach's serpent on the tree. Along with all its other significance it serves as a symbol of defiance against the iconoclasts, and as a kind of emblematic refutation of their central Biblical argument.

So far so good. But to this point what we have found in Lutheran aesthetics are essentially negative claims: images should not be worshipped; images are not to be banned. Is there any positive content to Luther's theory of art? I think that there is. At the heart of Luther's response to the iconoclasts we find a simple and oft-quoted maxim: "*Non est disputatio de substantia, sed usu et abusa rerum.*"<sup>32</sup> Paraphrasing: what matters about a work of art is not the thing itself but its use or abuse. This may now seem trivial or even trite, but it turns out to be quite important. It is clear that for Luther the central *abuse* of art is idolatry – or indeed anything that might lead to idolatry. But then what would be a proper *use*? In the polemical work of 1525 Luther proposes this answer:

[I would not condemn] those who have destroyed [images], especially those who destroy divine and idolatrous images. But images *for memorial and witness*, such as crucifixes and images of saints, are to be tolerated. And this is shown above to be the case even in Mosaic law. And they are not only to be tolerated, but for the sake of the *memorial and the witness* they are praiseworthy and honorable ...<sup>33</sup>

By itself this may not seem much to go on, but it does suggest an important adjustment in our approach to Cranach's painting. So far our interpretation has focused exclusively on the *representational content* of the painting; but to approach it in Luther's terms we must think about its *use* by the sort of viewer for whom it was presumably intended. And in particular we should ask about what kind of "memorial and witness" it might be intended to provide.

The second heated Lutheran controversy from this period was of course the dispute with Erasmus over free will. I shall not here enter into the details of this very public quarrel, which itself threatened to divide Luther's Wittenberg circle.<sup>34</sup> I confine my comments to one particularly striking point in this rather acrimonious exchange. As we have already noted, Erasmus had in 1524 published

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significance of the serpent, particularly in connection with Christ's invocation of the serpent at John 3:14, see *Luther's Sermon Preached on the Day of the Holy Trinity, 1522*. Cranach includes images of the brazen serpent in a series of works dealing with the theme of *The Law and the Gospel*, and in a number of other works. Perhaps most importantly, it figures crucially in the complex self-portrait (*The Weimar Altarpiece: Crucifixion with the Law and the Gospel*; FR no. 434) completed by his son after his death. For a discussion see Koerner 1993: 406ff.

<sup>32</sup> Luther, *Sermons on the Five Books of Moses*; *Werke* 28:554. In commenting on this principle Koerner writes: "Luther did not accept or reject images because of any immanent power, good or evil, they might possess. Rather, he judged them *by their effect on the viewer and by the uses to which they were put.*" Koerner 1993: 364, emphasis added. See also Stirn 1977: 47.

<sup>33</sup> Luther, *Against the Heavenly Prophets*; *Werke* 18:74, Tappert III: 169, emphasis added.

<sup>34</sup> Melancthon in particular, who was a close associate of Luther's and portrait-subject for Cranach, was notoriously caught in the middle of the dispute. The various editions of his theology textbook, the *Loci Communes*, exhibit his struggles to come to terms with this question. For an incisive accounting see Graybill 2002.

an anti-Lutheran tract defending free will; Luther responded in 1525 with *On the Bondage of the Will* -- his ardent defense of an uncompromising metaphysical determinism. Unlike later debates on these topics, the debate between Luther and Erasmus was conducted almost entirely at a theological level and centered on the proper interpretation of scripture. One crucial point of controversy in the exchange came to focus on the image of man standing *in bivio* -- at a crossroads of choice.<sup>35</sup> As Erasmus sees it, the Bible is filled with gripping tales of man standing at an existential crossroads: Adam's story is one instance, but we can also think of Abraham (whether to sacrifice Isaac), Job (whether to blaspheme), Peter the Apostle (whether to deny Christ), etc. etc. As Erasmus sees it, God is forever placing man at a crossroads of choice; that is a central message of scripture and a fundamental feature of the human situation. But what could be the sense of being placed at a crossroads if we lack the capacity to choose? Wouldn't it have been perverse -- indeed ridiculous -- for God to have placed man at the crossroads if he had denied him freedom of the will?

To my ear this sounds like a pretty convincing argument (at least within the agreed confines of the debate), but Luther offers a startling reply:

Truly, therefore, we are at a crossroads, but only one way is open; or rather no way is open, but by means of the law it is shown how impossible one of them is, namely the way of good, unless God gives the Spirit, and how broad and easy the other is if God allows us to take it. It would not be ridiculous, therefore, but a matter of due seriousness, to say to a man standing at a crossroads, 'Take which way you like,' -- if he was either inclined to imagine himself strong when he was weak, or was contending that neither road was closed.<sup>36</sup>

I find this a very disturbing passage. Luther here effectively embraces the paradox that Erasmus had used for his *reductio* of the determinist position. According to Luther, God *does* put man at the crossroads; he *does* effectively say 'Take which way you like'; and yet he *does not* endow the man at the crossroads with free will or the capacity to choose. In fact there is only one path available. What can be the point of such a perverse contrivance? Here we are very close indeed to the nub of the theodicy challenge. And Luther's answer seems to be that such a contrivance is *not* perverse, is not 'ridiculous,' as Erasmus had alleged; rather it is a circumstance *designed by God to provide the man at the crossroads with a kind of self-knowledge or self-awareness* -- or as I would put it: to teach him something about his own ontological constitution.

This is a thought that is echoed in a number of related passages in the Lutheran corpus, and was certainly a Lutheran doctrine with which Cranach was familiar. Consider the following three passages as exemplary:

[God's commandments] are intended to teach man to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and despair of his own ability.<sup>37</sup>

St. Paul concludes here that, if we understand the law properly and comprehend it in the best possible way, then we will see that its sole function is to remind us of our

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<sup>35</sup> For an account of this trope see Koerner 1993, ch. 16: "*Homo interpret in bivio: Luther and Cranach.*" In this paragraph and the ones that follow I am enormously indebted to Koerner's rich analysis.

<sup>36</sup> Luther, *de Servo Arbitrio*; *Werke* 18: 677; quoted at Koerner 1993: 396.

<sup>37</sup> *On the Freedom of a Christian*; Tappert II: 24; *Werke* 7:52, *Werke Works* 31:348.

sins, to kill us by our sins, and to make us deserving of eternal wrath. Conscience learns and experiences all this in detail when it comes face to face with the law.<sup>38</sup>

The purpose of every word of scripture and every action is to effect the change by which every man becomes spiritually a sinner, and this change must take place in our self-awareness and self-esteem.<sup>39</sup>

All three passages bear in one way or another on forms of self-consciousness: self-recognition, self-knowledge, self-awareness, conscience, self-remembering. But there is something that seems almost hideous in these passages – not simply in the pessimistic claim that man is unable to do good, but in the disturbing suggestion that God’s laws are *intended to produce despair*, that God sets out ‘to make us deserving of eternal wrath’, that the aim of scripture is that ‘every man becomes a sinner.’ This, I find, is one of the darkest corners of Luther’s theology; but it is in this dark corner that we find the setting for his distinctive account of the phenomenology of self-consciousness.

For Luther, the key in all this is to understand the function of divine law. On Luther’s account God never expects his commandments to be obeyed; he knows full well that they will not *and cannot* be. This is not simply an instance of divine foreknowledge; it derives rather from the nature of the commandments themselves, and from the nature of the being to whom they are directed. Luther:

For example, the commandment, “You shall not covet,” is a command which proves us all to be sinners, for no one can avoid coveting no matter how much he may struggle against it. ... As we fare with respect to one commandment, so we fare with all, for it is equally impossible for us to keep any one of them.<sup>40</sup>

So what is the function of divine law, if not to produce obedience? Why would God make laws that he knows cannot be obeyed? Luther offers two interconnected answers:

Therefore in order not to covet and to fulfill the commandment, a man is compelled to despair of himself, to seek help which he does not find in himself elsewhere and from someone else. (*ibid.*)

For Luther, God’s laws ultimately fulfill their function only when they prompt the Christian’s turn “to seek help ... elsewhere and from someone else.” But in order to do so they must first perform a more fundamental function: *the law brings man to despair*, and it is only in such despair that man comes face-to-face with his wretched constitution. In short, on Luther’s account, God’s commands to man were carefully contrived to produce not obedience but a self-conscious understanding of our own condition, specifically by showing us that we do not and cannot satisfy the demands we find placed upon us.

## §7 Self-Consciousness and Ontological Despair

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<sup>38</sup> *Preface to Romans*; <<find full cite>>.

<sup>39</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*; *Werke* 56:233; *Works* 25:217-218. Translation by Wilhelm Pauck in Luther 2006: lxvi; cited at Koerner 1993: 368.

<sup>40</sup> *On the Freedom of a Christian*; Tappert II:24; *Werke* 7:52, *Works* 31:348

This is not a paper with a happy ending. By way of conclusion I want to return once more to Cranach's painting, this time taking our lead from Luther's aesthetic maxim by focusing on the *use* of the painting, and on its function as a distinctive kind of memorial or witness. Clearly this is a hazardous strategy. It would be folly to speculate about the ways in which the painting was used by its originally intended viewers; we don't even know who those intended viewers were. Nonetheless I want to suggest that the painting itself *projects* a certain kind of use, and in so doing functions as a distinctive sort of memorial or witness. Let me elaborate my interpretation in three stages.

First stage: To think about Cranach's painting in relation to its viewers is to see it as an invitation of sorts. We might say that the painting invites its Christian viewers into Eden itself, the beautiful lost garden of paradise. But this is not quite right; we are not invited *into* Eden; Cranach's Eden remains closed off to us, as it has been for all human beings since the Fall. But we are invited to *gaze* upon Eden, *into Eden*, invited perhaps to a nostalgia for Eden, invited to contemplate all that has been lost. And it is not simply Eden that invites our gaze; it is the figures of Adam and Eve themselves – beautiful, seductive human bodies. But there is a further and more fundamental invitation at work here as well: *the painting invites us to identify with Adam*. It may be that this feature of the work is more pronounced for a male viewer, but it is an invitation that is surely intrinsic to the work itself. The painting captures the moment where everything turns on Adam's choice. His fate, our fate, the fate of everything hangs in the balance. To gaze upon the head-scratching Adam is thus to find oneself scratching one's own head. What should he do? What *can* he do? What would *I* do?

Second stage: But if the painting invites us to identify with Adam, to take up his circumstance, to contemplate the choice that faces him, there is also a way in which the painting rebuffs any attempt to take up that invitation. Indeed it makes it impossible for us to do so. Cranach's rendering of Adam cuts him off from us, emphasizing his difference and his distance from our situation. This effect is most immediately present in the blank look of Adam's face, in his eyes which refuse any reflection. But its deeper roots lie in Adam's circumstance itself, which the painting carefully memorializes. Adam doesn't have what we have; he doesn't have what Eve has; as we have seen, he doesn't even have what Cranach's animals are shown to have. We simply *cannot* project ourselves into his situation because the very self-consciousness and normative knowledge that *he lacks* are so fundamental to the kind of beings that *we are*. We might as well try to imagine what it is like to be a bat.

I want to propose that this dialectical tension is central to the effect of Cranach's work: the painting issues an invitation to the viewer, but we find it impossible fully to take it up. And in encountering this impossibility we are brought face-to-face with just how dire Adam's circumstance is. As we have seen, this is a major theme of the painting. Adam is placed in a circumstance of judgment, but he is a deeply incompetent judge. He lacks the gleam of knowledge in his eye; he lacks a firm knowledge of the difference between good and evil. And the company he keeps will seal his fate. Adam's situation is hopeless; he is subjected to a command that he cannot possibly hope to fulfill.

Third stage: But with this last thought we can now recognize a resolution to this dialectical tension. For here we find a sense in which we *can* after all identify with Adam; we *can* take up his

situation. Not as someone who faces the task of judgment without the benefit of normative orientation; *that* really is unthinkable. But we can identify with Adam as someone who is held accountable to a standard that he cannot possibly hope to satisfy. For Luther and his followers, that is *exactly* the situation of mankind – both before and after the fall. We are all like Adam in this respect, in being subject to a law that we cannot keep. Indeed for Luther, *that is our distinctive ontological condition*. We are accustomed to think about Judeo-Christian wretchedness as a *result* of Adam's fall, our inheritance of the original sin in Eden. Yet Cranach shows us that even pre-lapsarian Adam is wretched in this sense, being likewise incapable of adhering to the laws to which he is subject. Through this dialectical tension, the work does its work, making itself available to be used in a very particular way: as a remembrance and memorial of our own ontological condition, which we share even with pre-lapsarian Adam.

Let me here leave the theology behind. We have seen enough, I hope, to recognize that Cranach explores an elaborate solution to the theodicy problem. Whether that theodicy yields a God who is worthy of our worship is a matter that must be left to each to decide. But the lesson I want to draw is neither theological nor ethical but phenomenological. For along with everything else, what Cranach's painting brings into view is a vision of a distinctive form of human self-consciousness. Recall that the *Genesis* narrative culminates with the emergence of shame – the explosion of self-consciousness into the innocent of world of Eden. What exactly are Adam and Eve ashamed of? It would be natural to answer that they are ashamed of what they have done, of their act of transgression. But that is not the answer provided by the text: they are ashamed of their nakedness; they are ashamed of *what they are* and have discovered themselves to be. My aim here has been to use Cranach's accounting of Eden in order to bring this form of self-consciousness into view for further investigation. It is a form of self-consciousness that is ontological, normative, and despairing. It is ontological insofar as it involves an awareness not so much of one's existence as of one's essence or mode of being. It is normative insofar as it tells us not simply what we are but where we stand, how we measure up against the standards of success that belong to us. And it is despairing insofar as it involves awareness of an essential and inescapable failure – of being subjected to an infinite demand that we cannot possibly complete for ourselves.

Now one might think that such self-conscious despair would have to be a derivative form of self-consciousness. Surely one would first have to be conscious of oneself in order subsequently to appreciate one's wretched condition. But I am not sure about this. In its most unguarded and unqualified form, my hunch is that Luther (at least) thinks of this kind of despair as marking both the beginning and the core of human self-consciousness. Allow me to conclude with a mundane analogy to suggest how this might make sense. Think of the circumstance of waking from a sound sleep in order to find that one is overheated: perhaps one has a fever, or the furnace has been left on, or there are simply too many blankets. In such a circumstance one emerges into a state of self-awareness, and as one does, the primary content of that self-awareness is the realization that something is wrong. This self-awareness prompts a motor-response: one kicks off some blankets in order to recover one's

thermal equilibrium. There is here a single unified complex experience. The awareness of oneself comes along with an implicit awareness of a norm – a norm to which one is not conforming. The self, the norm, and the failure all emerge at once in one’s experience, wrenching us out of our prior unconsciousness and into a normatively oriented self-awareness. Prior to that emergence we are simply not self-aware at all.<sup>41</sup> But there is also a sense in which the norm is basic among the three elements of this phenomenological package. For both the self and the failure appear as they do because of their reference to the norm that has been violated. For Luther and Cranach, I want to suggest, the primary manifestation of self-consciousness involves an analogous complex awareness of self, of norm and of failure. The norm is divine law; the failure is human wretchedness. The crucial difference is that no motor response can suffice to bring about conformity.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Here is different example, and one that brings us closer to the concerns of the *Genesis* narrative. Think of the familiar anxious dream sequence where one suddenly realizes that one is naked or inadequately dressed in a public or formal setting. Here again we find an instance of self-consciousness that involves the co-emergence, in a single phenomenological package, of self-awareness, awareness of a norm, and awareness of one’s failure to conform to the norm.

<sup>42</sup> Earlier drafts of this paper were presented at the Essex Philosophy Writing Workshop, the Society for Existential Philosophy, the California Phenomenology Circle, and the Philosophy Society at the University of Sussex. I am grateful to Harvard University, California Polytechnic University, and the Royal Institute of Philosophy for financial support for these presentations, and to the audiences for their helpful feedback. The list of friends, colleagues and students who have helped me with this material is by now too long to complete, but I wish to mention in particular Beatrice Han-Pile, Dan Watts, David McNeill, Laurie Bussis, Joan Taylor and Leslie Tait. Laurence Reed first brought my attention to the issue of judgmental incompetence in Cranach, and directed me to the Courtauld Cranach. Garrett Miller provided extensive research assistance. I wish to dedicate the paper to the memory of my friend and colleague Mark Sacks (1953-2008); our last afternoon together was spent discussing Adam in Tuffnel Park.

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