



Adam and Eve (1999), by Natasha Turovsky

Shame on Us

“The Genesis of Shame” by J. David Velleman, in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (Winter 2001), Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, Journals Publishing Division, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, Md. 21211.

It may be the oldest story of shame: Boy meets girl, girl offers boy a bite of an apple, and then—as it says in Genesis 3:7—“the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.” But even though the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge was supposed to make Adam and Eve “like God, knowing good and evil,” it was not their nakedness itself that caused them to feel shame, says Velleman, a philosophy professor at the University of Michigan, nor was it their sudden apprehension of the sexual possibilities of their situation, an interpretation that echoes St. Augustine.

Rather, Velleman proposes, the first couple’s disobedience of God’s prohibition against eating the fruit revealed to them that they now had *choices*—to obey or disobey, or to “be fruitful and multiply” or decide not to procreate. This “ability to choose in opposition to inclination,” in other

words, gave Adam and Eve private selves, able to make personal choices. Their naked bodies caused them shame because of their “realization that their bodies might obey their instincts instead” of their newfound will, thus betraying their private selves.

Velleman believes that this new interpretation of the Genesis story has something to tell us about “the shamelessness of our culture.” In his view, much of the shame humans feel is caused by a perceived loss of privacy. Everyone creates for themselves a public image, a persona necessary for any social interaction, and necessarily different from the private self. This performing self is vitally important to each individual’s social life; it is what makes one a candidate for “conversation, cooperation, or even competition and conflict.” When something occurs that undermines this created image—a personal bankruptcy, for

The Real Meaning of Jihad

Jihad is perhaps the most loaded word in the lexicon of Islam's relations with the West. Over the last 20 years, it has been invoked by a succession of Muslim movements to justify their violence. Terrorist groups, some of them infamous for suicide bombings, have even named themselves "Islamic Jihad." And Osama bin Ladin described his terror campaign as a jihad. After September 11, America looked expectantly to its "experts" to explain what jihad means for those who invoke it.

They . . . were told that Osama had it all wrong: Jihad has nothing to do with war or violence. As one listened to the academics, jihad began to sound like a traditional self-help technique—perhaps an Islamic version of controlled breathing.

Consider, for example, a New York Times op-ed written by Roy Mottahedeh, the Gurney Professor of History at Harvard. Mottahedeh began by citing Muslim clerics who had condemned September 11 as a violation of Islamic law. Indeed, some did condemn it. But then he made a leap. "Some politicians and imperfectly educated Muslim clerics have used the word jihad loosely in the sense of armed struggle," he complained. But "this meaning is rejected by most modern Muslim scholars, who say it properly refers to the struggle against the distortion of Islam." According to Mottahedeh, "a majority of learned Muslim thinkers, drawing on impeccable scholarship, insist that jihad must be understood as a struggle without arms."

Jihad—unarmed struggle? How so? Barbara Stowasser, professor of Arabic at Georgetown University, elaborated at a forum held on her campus in October. "Jihad," she stated, "is a serious personal commitment to the faith," a struggle against "evil intentions," and a "working toward the moral betterment of society." Only at the very end of the Qur'an is it used to denote armed struggle, and even then, she added, Muslims are enjoined only to engage in defensive war. In Stowasser's view, al-Qaeda "goes against the majority of Islam and against most of Islamic legal theory." They were a group that "picks and chooses in its approach to the Qur'an."

Well, of course they do, but so do the American scholars who have picked and chosen their way through the Qur'an and Islamic legal theory, in a deliberate effort to demilitarize both, or even to turn Islam into a pacifist faith—a kind of oriental Quakerism. This interpretation is as tendentious as al-Qaeda's. Emile Tyan, author of the article on jihad in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, described this approach as "wholly apologetic." "Jihad consists of military action with the object of the expansion of Islam," he determined; presenting it as peaceful persuasion or self-defense "disregard[s] entirely the previous doctrine and historical tradition, as well as the texts of the Qur'an and the Sunna." In fact, someone has to be "imperfectly educated" to argue that jihad must be understood as a struggle without arms. As Rudolph Peters wrote in his book on the doctrine of jihad, it is the idea of pacifist or defensive jihad that is new; Islamists (like bin Ladin) are much closer to classical doctrine. And that doctrine has enjoyed an obvious revival over the past 20 years. . . .

The problem with the Islam "experts" is that they are so enamored of their subject that they feel compelled to shore up its defenses, to the point of posing as Islam's reformers. It's a professional deformation with a long history in Islamic studies. One might question whether the reform of Islam is the proper job of American university professors, who are paid to explain. But they prefer to plead and apologize, and who can stop them? If only real Islam did conform to the Islam of the American academy. Even New York's skyline would attest to it.

—Martin Kramer, the author of *Arab Awakening & Islamic Revival: The Politics of Ideas in the Middle East* (1996), is the editor of *The Middle East Quarterly*, where this essay appeared (Spring 2002).

instance—the individual suffers a “failure of privacy” and, says Velleman, feels shame. Blushing, the physiological response to shame, can lead to even more feelings of shame since, again, the blush exposes the private self.

Velleman thinks that the much discussed “de-moralization” of society is more easily understood through his conception of shame. Someone who poses nude in a magazine or reveals kinky secrets on a talk show will likely *not* feel shame, in his view. Why not? Because the exposure is a personal choice that now becomes part of the individual’s public face. It is intentional. But a person caught changing clothes at the beach

would likely still feel shame, because the exposure was unintended.

Velleman agrees with those who argue that American society is far gone in shamelessness, but he doesn’t think the solution is to “rescandalize” things such as births out of wedlock. The problem is that the public self has gotten out of control: “People now think that not to express inclinations or impulses is in effect to claim that one doesn’t have them, and that honesty therefore requires one to express whatever inclinations or impulses one has.” There is no quick fix. What’s needed, according to Velleman, is a larger sense of privacy, a renewed understanding that people are not all they appear to be.

The Aura of Celibacy

“The Scourge of Celibacy” by Garry Wills, in *The Boston Globe Magazine* (Mar. 24, 2002),
P. O. Box 2378, Boston, Mass. 02107–2378.

Conservative Catholics insist that priestly celibacy has nothing to do with the pedophilia scandals that have rocked the church. On the contrary, it has *something* to do with the pedophilia, and *everything* to do with the cover-ups, argues Wills, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian and the author of *Papal Sin* (2000).

“The ‘grace’ (charisma) of celibacy, a thing now suspect, was the source of a priest’s high standing, of the special aura that set him apart,” Wills says. That aura may not cause pedophilia, but it does “foster and protect it,” giving clerical pedophiles unmatched “ease of access” to young prey. Unlike Boy Scout leaders, teachers, and others in professions that run special risks of harboring pedophiles, priests were “presumed to be disciplined by [their] code of sexual abstinence.” Unlike the coach or the teacher, the priest “had the whole care of the child’s soul as his province” and could range far and wide in the lives of children. Trusting Catholic parents were reluctant, even after their children were abused, to damage the aura that priests enjoy.

Catholic bishops and other hierarchical superiors have been even more hesitant to impair the aura, Wills notes. “They can see that a wrong has been done to a few children, but they feel that the souls of all children depend on their receiving the truths of the faith with respect for the carrier of that good news. This

is the higher good next to which bishops have weighed too lightly the harm done to the abused.” (As for the reassignment of pedophile priests, the bishops accepted “the faulty assurances given them by therapists in the past” that the men were “cured.”)

Conservative Catholics have pointed out that, despite the “pedophile priest” headlines, most of the youths involved in the recent scandals were not young children but teenage boys. The need, they say, is to screen out not only pedophiles but actively gay aspirants to the priesthood. Wills has a different take: “Though being gay has nothing to do with pedophilia, the claim of celibacy is obviously being hollowed out by sexual activity, whether heterosexual or homosexual, whether with consenting adults or with abused minors. The protection of the aura of celibacy demands the coverup of a whole range of activities.”

Celibacy was not always demanded of priests. Not until the fourth century did it begin to become the norm, arising as “ascetics of the desert became so famed for their heroic abstinence that people began to consult them and to look down on priests as insufficiently holy to be given the kind of reverence that hermits had earned.” The priests embraced celibacy as a countermeasure. Today, however, celibacy has lost its original justification. The time has come, in Wills’s view, for the church to start phasing out mandatory celibacy.