

## DISRUPTING THE STORY: ENTER EVE

Keywords: different voice, Adam and Eve, patriarchy, double consciousness, human development

In a course on listening that I teach at NYU, we begin each year with Freud—the case of Fraulein Elisabeth von R. from *Studies on Hysteria* (Breuer and Freud 1893–1895). It has become a Baedeker for my students, a guide they can follow as they embark on a journey of psychological inquiry, aided by the exquisite precision with which Freud tracks his own path to discovery and the steps he took in coming to comprehend what were at first mysteries: why Elisabeth suffers great pain in walking and in her own words could not “take a single step forward” (p. 152); why, as he observes along the way, a “group of ideas relating to her love had already been separated from her knowledge” (p. 157); and, lastly, why is it that when Elisabeth claims not to know what is happening to her, in fact she does know (although as Freud notes in the case of Miss Lucy R., she may not know that she knows it (pp. 110–111).

In addition to reading Freud in the first week of the term, we read Piaget’s introduction to *The Child’s Conception of the World* (1926), where he argues that only by using a clinical method can we come to know another person’s way of conceiving the world. And we read Audre Lorde’s essay in *Sister Outsider* (1984), “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”

In their early work, both Freud and Piaget forged new methods of investigation—free association and the *methode clinique*. These were tools that could in fact be used to dismantle the master’s house, in part by revealing what women know, including about the masters, and also by exposing the master’s house for what it is: a construction of reality rather than the repository of truth.

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Plenary address, American Psychoanalytic Association, New York, February 14, 2020.

Over many years of teaching this class, first at Harvard and now at NYU, I have come to believe that psychoanalysis and to some extent psychology more generally have been contested, not to say embattled, in part because they offer us tools, including free association and the clinical method, that can in fact dismantle the master's house. Yet to the extent that we continue to live in that house, we are, to say the least, conflicted.

Last June on two occasions I was asked to speak about *In a Different Voice* (Gilligan 1982). Going over what for me was familiar terrain, I was surprised to arrive at an insight about something that had been confusing me for many years. It occurred to me that I had inadvertently built a tension into the title of both my initial essay—"In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality" (1977)—and the book that followed: *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (1982). I had joined an exploration of difference (a different voice—different from what?) with the subject of women, thus setting myself up for a trap that it has taken me years to extricate myself from: Are women different? Are women different from men? Do women make a difference? Am I an essentialist? Do I not know that not all women are the same? Do I know that race and class matter as well as or even more than sex or gender? And so on. Ironically, my work came to be viewed through the lens of the very binary comparisons and hierarchies that my focus on the idea of a *different* voice had led me to question.

It was the winter of 1975. My husband and I had recently moved with our three children from what to them may have seemed like one end of the world to the other—namely, from Newton to Brookline, two suburbs of Boston—and I had stayed home that year to help them adjust to the change. Had I asked myself the question about identity I was asking others, "How would you describe yourself to yourself?" I would likely have said, "I'm the mother of three young children, I'm a dancer—I'd danced with a performing modern dance troupe—I'm a political activist—I'd done voter registration in the civil rights movement and marched in anti-war demonstrations, in the lingo of the day I was "another mother for peace"—and I have a part-time job teaching at Harvard. There I initiated a study on a question that interested me: How do people think about themselves and about morality in actual situations of conflict and choice, when they will have to live with the outcomes of their decision? In 1973, following the Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, Mary Belenky, then a graduate student at Harvard, and I began interviewing women who were pregnant

and considering abortion. How would you describe yourself to yourself? we asked. How did you get pregnant? (that amused the teenagers in the study), and how have you been thinking about it so far? Those were our questions.

But that's by way of background. The paper I wrote at my kitchen table that winter of 1975, "In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and of Morality," was the first thing I wrote that wasn't for school. I was responding not to an assignment but to an inner voice saying, "If you want to know what I think . . .," secure in the conviction that in fact no one was interested. In short, I was writing for myself.

I was listening to women's voices, mine and those of other women, making women's voices heard in their own right and with their own integrity in conversations about self and about morality, and by doing so, I was disrupting the narrative of psychological and moral development, displacing its insistent focus on separateness to depict a reality of connectedness and interdependence.

The paper—it was the time of purple mimeograph machines—circulated among my students, who sent it to friends who sent it to friends. Circulated like *samizdat*, which fit with my sense of myself at that time as a member of some sort of underground. And then one day, one of these students, who was on the editorial board of the student-run *Harvard Educational Review*, asked if he could submit the paper to the journal. And without thinking much about it, I said okay.

I don't remember how long they kept it. Only that it came back saying, "Rejected." Just that. No request to revise and resubmit. Just rejected. Along with the comment: "We don't know what this is."

And that got my back up. You don't know what this is? I will add headings. Which I did, and sent it back to them.

This time when it came back they said: This is not social science. If you will rewrite the paper from a neutral or objective standpoint and in the passive voice, we will consider it.

I said: "It's called 'In a Different Voice.'"

And for whatever reason, I suspect because by that time they were tired of dealing with me, they decided to publish the paper and be done with it.

That the essay went on to become a citation classic, the best-selling reprint of the *Harvard Ed Review*, and the centerpiece of my 1982 book makes this a good story to tell to graduate students who are tempted to

withdraw in the face of rejection, or cannot imagine that *In a Different Voice* could have had such an inauspicious beginning. But I'm telling it to you now because it was in telling this story this past June, telling it twice, that I came to see that at the very outset "In a Different Voice" was recognized for what it was: a disruption.

And then the disruption was smoothed over, made less disruptive—and here's the insight—because what was a problem in psychological and moral theory became a problem about women. Women. Oh right, women. Women have always been a problem, but now we know that we should listen to women and include women in our studies of human psychology because in fact women are humans and so it goes. All of which is true, but not really the point.

In a sleight of hand, "we don't know what this is" had become "we know what this is." This is about women and women's development, about women being different from men. The different voice was coopted, conscripted one might say, heard as "feminine" and thereby placed within the very framework or way of speaking that it challenged. When a voice that protests and resists is thus silenced, the stage is set for a confusion of tongues, to borrow Ferenczi's phrase (1932), not only within the individual psyche but also within the culture at large.

Enter Eve.

Last summer as I was thinking about disruption and women, I was also thinking about Eve. I'm writing a novel about a dancer and as often happens in writing fiction, characters appear with their names. My dancer is Eve, and at some point it occurred to me to ask: Eve? Why Eve? And to reread the Garden of Eden story. I thought I knew the story but there on the page, right in front of me, in black and white, were elements of the story that I had overlooked, words whose meaning I hadn't taken in. Then, in the spring of 2017, I was told something about the first woman that struck me as totally improbable. And yet at the same time, profoundly true. This was a disruption at a much deeper level.

I'll start with the story. You or at least most of you know it—Adam and Eve are in the Garden of Eden. Actually she's called "the woman" until they are about to be expelled from the garden, at which point Adam names her *Chava*, or Eve, from the Hebrew word *chaya*, meaning life. Because, the Bible explains, she is the one who will bring forth life; she will be the mother.

But that's not where it starts. The story begins with the serpent, the "most cunning of all the beasts in the field," who asks the woman, Can you eat from all the trees in this garden, and she says, yes, all but the one in the center and if we eat from that tree or touch the fruit, we will die. And the serpent says No, you won't die. Your eyes will be opened and you will be as gods, knowing good and evil. *Eitz ha-daat tov v'ra*—tree of knowledge, good and evil. We know this as a story about forbidden knowledge, about temptation and transgression, about man and woman.

What I hadn't known, what I literally hadn't seen or taken in, is what follows the interchange between the woman and the serpent. The woman now has been told two conflicting truths: you will die; you will not die. So what does she do?

She looks at the tree. She's not the dupe of the serpent or seduced by the prospect of being as gods. In the face of conflicting authorities and truths, she decides to see for herself and—she acts on her own perceptions.

Here's the King James translation: "And when the woman *saw* that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat" (p. 3; emphasis added). In Robert Alter's 2019 translation, "And the woman *saw* that the tree was good for eating and that it was lust to the eyes and the tree was lovely to look at, and she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave to her man with her, and he ate" (p. 16; emphasis added).

Essentially the same: this could be the story of any woman or every-woman or for that matter everyman or anyone who, seeing a fruit that is good for food, and pleasing to the eye, and a source of nourishment or wisdom (like fish if you consider fish brain food), takes it and eats it and when nothing happens (no one dies, no one sews fig leaves to cover one's nakedness), gives it to the one they love. An ordinary story.

But once Adam has eaten the fruit, that's when the story shifts and suddenly they are hiding from God and sewing fig leaves and making loincloths to cover their nakedness, and in the cool of the evening, when God comes into the garden, God calls not for the woman but for Adam, and it is then that the blaming starts: Adam blames the woman and she blames the serpent. God punishes Adam and the woman for their transgression of his commandment. To the woman he says: "And for your man shall be your longing, and he shall rule over you." To the human, to Adam,

he says: “Because you listened to the voice of your wife” and disobeyed my commandments, “Cursed be the soil for your sake, with pangs shall you eat from it all the days of your life” (Alter, p. 17). Or, in the more familiar King James rendition, “in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of your life” (p. 3).

That story also we know. The story of it was all her fault.

But here’s what truly astounded me. In the spring of 2017 I was invited to speak in the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, by women members from the center and left-wing parties. The session was held in a conference room of the Knesset building in Jerusalem, and about one hundred fifty people, mostly women, were invited to attend. In the question period following my talk, one of the women, an international human rights lawyer, asked: “Have you heard of *ezer k’negdo*?”

No. I had no idea what she was talking about.

She translated the Hebrew words: *ezer* means helper, though not in the sense of a servant or a subordinate because God is an *ezer*, and *k’negdo* means by opposing or pulling in an opposite direction. Like a dialectic, she explained. *Ezer k’negdo*: to help by opposing; confronting is another translation according to my friend, the Israeli philosopher Moshe Halbertal. It means to be opposite someone, to face them, or as the woman lawyer said that day in Jerusalem, to pull someone in an opposite direction.

*Ezer k’negdo* is from the book of Genesis; from the second creation story, where God creates Adam, the earthling, the human, and seeing that Adam is lonely, creates the animals to keep him company. But then God sees this is not sufficient. What Adam needs, God sees, is an *ezer k’negdo*, someone who will help him by opposing him, and so God creates woman.

I was stunned. How come we don’t know this? Or maybe you do. How come I didn’t know this?

And in one sense the answer is clear: because *negdo* is not translated. It is simply left out in English translations, as if it were not there. “Help meet” is the King James translation (p. 2), “helpmate” is an alternative; no whiff of opposition. The *New English Bible* says “partner” (p. 3). Robert Alter translates *ezer k’negdo* as “sustainer beside him,” adding in a footnote that the Hebrew phrase *ezer k’negdo* “is notoriously difficult to translate,” although why this is so remains a mystery. In this footnote, Alter writes that *negdo* “means ‘alongside him,’ ‘opposite him,’ ‘a counterpart to him’” (p. 14). It’s the notion of opposition that gets lost. As if it were inconceivable that the words could mean what on the face of it they

mean. Or more to the point, impossible to think that man, the human, needed a woman to help him by opposing him—or confronting him, or challenging him, or questioning him, or facing him or pulling him in a direction opposite to the one where, left to himself, he most likely would go. And whatever god said this—whoever wrote the words *ezer k'negdo* into the story of woman's creation—that voice could not be listened to, in contrast to the familiar story about seduction and disobedience. Because truly, what man or what God could even conceive that a man, a human, would need a woman to help him in this way? There is nothing difficult about the words themselves, *ezer* or for that matter *negdo*, an ordinary word, *neged*, which in everyday Hebrew means against, and with the “o,” against him or it, like a team in basketball playing against another team. It's the concept of a woman's opposition being helpful to man that is “notoriously difficult” to stomach.

Yet somebody, some ancient sage, left tracks, footprints in the sand. And to follow these tracks leads one to a very different reading of the Adam and Eve story and also, I would say, theories of self and morality and development. In this reading, the woman, an afterthought in this conception of the world, sees where things are heading when knowledge of good and evil belongs solely to a Lord God on high and man is barred from grasping what is in nature (as a tree is in nature), including in his own nature. In short, somewhere, someone long ago saw that under these conditions, the human would need someone to pull him in an opposite direction, away from the path that will lead to the woman becoming subjugated to him, out of the story that ends with “And he shall rule over her.” Where he is the human and she is the mother. In short, the patriarchal story.

I am riveted by these traces of an alternative story, set down long ago and then eclipsed by what we have come to know as “the story.” Why, we may wonder, does this insight into a man's need have to be covered? Recently I came upon a passage in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), and I realized that Morrison understood why. The passage involves the character Paul D and his relationship to Sethe—the mother of Beloved. Speaking in the voice of Paul D, Morrison writes, “Sethe, she's fixed me and I can't break it.” Morrison then tracks Paul D's thoughts: “What? A grown man fixed by a girl. . . and fucking her or not was not the point, it was not being able to stay [in her house] or go where he wished . . . the danger was in losing Sethe because he was not man enough to break out, so he needed her, Sethe,

Figure 1



Illustration from Daumas (2019), in *Liberation*, December 14–15. Design: Maria Medem

to help him, to know about it, and it shamed him to have to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help him do it, God damn it to hell” (p. 149). Because, as it says just a few lines earlier, “he was a man and a man could do what he would” (p. 148). Because his needing Sethe to know about it and to help him break out or to fix it shamed him. It made him not a man.

So here we are.

This is the story we need to disrupt, and we need to do so before it’s too late. Figure 1 is an illustration, from the French newspaper *Liberation*, that ran alongside an interview I did with Cécile Daumas (2019) following the French translation of my book, written with Naomi Snider, *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* (Gilligan and Snider 2018). Because if we ask, with reference to Morrison’s novel, what Paul D needed Sethe to help him break out from, and what he needed her to fix, the answer is the emotional lockdown that besets a man in patriarchy. The conception of manhood that forces Paul D, in Morrison’s haunting image, to carry his tears locked up inside him, in “that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut” (p. 86). For him to break out or break that tin open, to fix it, meant to experience the shame he would feel in



experiencing emotions that would cause him to believe “I am not a man,” which is what, in fact, he wants to tell Sethe but cannot bring himself to say (pp.149–150).

Let me be very clear about what I am and am not saying. In the book of Genesis there are two creation stories. One is told at the very outset of Genesis 1, where out of the void God creates the world in six days, starting with heaven and earth and ending with humans: “male and female, created he them” (*Holy Bible*, p. 1). No hierarchy, no either/or binary, just humans, male and female. It could be a spectrum. In the second story, in Genesis 2, on the day the Lord God—for he is now called Lord God both in the King James and by Alter—on the day the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, he fashioned the human from the soil (*humus*, or in Hebrew *adama*) and blew into his nostrils the breath of life so there would be someone to till the soil. In contrast to Genesis 1, this creation story is a patriarchal story. In the beginning, the Lord God creates Adam, the earthling who is man; initially there is no thought of woman. But then God sees that Adam is lonely—you know how it goes—and this in turn leads to the recognition that what Adam needs is an *ezer k’negdo*, so God puts Adam to sleep and out of his side creates an *ezer k’negdo* for him. That is, he creates woman.

What I’m saying is that embedded within this second, patriarchal creation story is a story of resistance to patriarchy. So there are in effect three stories: the first creation story, in Genesis 1 (“male and female created he them”); the second creation story, in Genesis 2, where God creates Adam, man, and what follows is dictated by man’s needs—that is, the patriarchal story. And then, within the patriarchal story is a resistance story, where God creates woman to help Adam resist patriarchy. It’s not that she’s right and he’s wrong; rather, it is as Toni Morrison says: he needs her to help him by doing what he cannot do on his own, fix it or break out, because the situation of man differs from the situation of woman within a patriarchal order, and for whatever combination of reasons she has the power to help him break out. She has the ability to fix it.

There are many ways to read the story of woman made from Adam’s rib, but in my reading the words *ezer k’negdo* are the tip-off. What strikes me is that some wise person way back then saw that within this patriarchal conception of the world, Adam, the man, will be vulnerable in a way that will lead him to need a helper who is strong (an *ezer*) and who, seeing where this is heading—into hiding and covering, blaming and shaming,

punishment and suffering, entrapment and domination—will help him by pulling in an opposite direction. Someone, a woman, a being, a human who is not foreign to him, but who is created out of a side of himself. Someone in touch with his humanity.

When I look at the illustration from *Liberation*—the man blinded, unable to see that he is about to walk off a cliff; the woman silenced, unable to say what she sees, bracing herself but kept from saying what she knows—it strikes me, in its primary colors, as the Little Prince rendering of the Oedipus tragedy or, more simply, a primal story. Something we know on an elemental level, like primary education, before a secondary education sets in and we learn how we are supposed to see and to speak about the world, including what we are not to see or to say. To put it in Ferenczi's terms, before we confuse a patriarchal voice with our own.

In the layered creation story in the book of Genesis, the patriarchal story is an overlay. It displaces an earlier story about humans and contains within itself the human's need for someone to help by opposing or disrupting the patriarchal narrative. The agent of this disruption is a woman. And in this respect it makes sense that the "different voice" was heard as a woman's voice, or a "feminine" voice. It is only now, when the disruption has spread through the human sciences in the form of a paradigm shift, also known as the relational turn, that relational capabilities and emotional intelligence have lost their feminine gendering and become recognized instead as human capacities (and as the primatologist Frans de Waal [2009] says in writing about empathy, not a recent acquisition but an "innate, age-old capacity" [p. 205]).

Now the different voice can be heard for what it is: a human voice. Our voice, in the beginning. A voice that joins thinking and feeling, self and relationship, mind and body. And with this realization comes the corollary recognition as the work of Damasio (1994, 1999) and other neuroscientists and the studies of developmental psychologists have shown: namely, that separations once hailed as milestones of progress (the separation of reason from emotion, the separation of the self from relationships) are more accurately viewed as manifestations of injury or trauma. A trauma story had been cast as a narrative of development. Once this was seen, the questions changed. When someone lacks empathy or appears relationally clueless or seemingly has no voice, we are prompted now to ask what happened. What happened to this human being?

The developmental studies I embarked on with my graduate students following *In a Different Voice* provided an answer by highlighting a process of initiation, culturally sanctioned and socially enforced, that required dissociation. It forced a split in consciousness so that we could hold parts of our experience outside our awareness and come not to know what in another sense we do know. “I don’t know,” became the marker of this initiation for girls; for boys the marker was “I don’t care.” An injunction—“don’t”—came between “I” and knowing or caring. To establish or shore up a patriarchal order it was necessary that girls not know what they know through experience and boys not care about what in truth they care about deeply.

By attending to girls’ experiences in the transition from childhood to adolescence and what happens to connections between women and girls at this time, the ten-year Harvard Project on Women’s Psychology and Girls’ Development filled in a missing stretch of psychological history (see Gilligan 1990; Gilligan, Rogers, and Tolman 1991; Brown and Gilligan 1992; Taylor, Gilligan, and Sullivan 1995). Recasting what had been conceived as a developmental progression as a process of initiation, the research with girls spurred a new look at boys’ development, especially at times when questions about masculinity come to the fore. With remarkable precision, Judy Chu (2014) observed what happens to boys’ relational capabilities between the ages of four and seven, the time when boys become “boys” (or how boys are often said to be), and Niobe Way (2011), drawing on the voices of adolescent boys across a range of ethnicity and social class, brilliantly illuminated boys’ emotional acuity in depicting the importance of close friendships and also the crisis of connection they faced in coming to “know how to be more of a man” (p. 242). As Way makes clear in *Deep Secrets*, the deepest secret is that boys are humans. To put it starkly, as a healthy body resists infection, a healthy psyche disrupts patriarchy.

In *Meeting at the Crossroads* (Brown and Gilligan 1992), Lyn Mikel Brown and I captured this disruption in the voices of preadolescent girls narrating their experiences in coming of age. A cultural force swept like a wind through these girls’ lives at adolescence, unsettling the ground of their experience and rendering it, in the words of the Jamaican American poet Michelle Cliff, an “obsolete geography” (1985). In a five-year longitudinal/cross-sectional study of close to a hundred girls between the ages of seven and seventeen, the voices of the younger girls took us by surprise, which in itself was surprising given that we once were girls. We were uncovering a history

that had been covered over, rewritten, or forgotten, as girls' honest voices came to be heard as and called, including by some girls themselves, "stupid," "rude," "bad," "naive," or "crazy." Lyn and I summarized what we came to know by listening to the younger girls in the study:

Anita and her classmates speak of their thoughts and feelings about relationships in direct ways, describing their willingness to speak out to those with whom they are in relationship about bad or hurt feelings, anger, resentment, or frustration, as well as feelings of love, fondness, and loyalty. These seven- and eight-year-old girls say matter-of-factly that people are different, that they may disagree, and, as a result, sometimes people get hurt. While they speak about the importance of being nice, they openly acknowledge that sometimes they do not feel like being nice; they know that they can hurt others, and they speak about being hurt by others. In this sense, their relationships seem genuine or authentic.

These young girls tell stories of times when they refuse to take no for an answer. If they think someone is not listening, they will try again; and if that doesn't work, they can find creative, though perhaps disruptive, ways of being heard . . . [Diana] says that she feels bad because her brother and sister keep stealing her mother's attention at dinner, interrupting her when she tries to speak. One night Diana's response to this problem was to bring a whistle to the dinner table. When she was interrupted, she blew the whistle. Mother, brother, and sister, she says, abruptly stopped talking and turned to her, at which point she said, "in a normal voice, 'That's much nicer'" [Brown and Gilligan 1992, p. 43].

We titled our chapter on the seven- and eight- year-olds "Whistle Blowers in the Relational World."

Think of Greta Thunberg—you know who she is—the Swedish girl just turned seventeen when *Time Magazine* named her its "person of the year" (Alter, Haynes, and Worland 2019). The girl whose one-person climate strike in August 2018 when she was fifteen—just Greta and her hand-written sign in front of the Swedish Parliament—had within sixteen months inspired four million people to join the global climate strike on September 20, 2019, the largest climate demonstration in history.

Greta was eight when she first learned about climate change. *Time* reports that her primary school teacher had shown "a video of its effects: starving polar bears, extreme weather and flooding. The teacher explained that it was all happening because of climate change. Afterward the entire class felt glum, but the other kids were able to move on. Thunberg couldn't. She began to feel extremely alone" (p. 58).

I have asked myself why. Why is it that a young girl managed to galvanize the realization that first struck her when she was eight and to

mobilize people on a scale that climate change activists had not previously managed, despite their greater knowledge and resources and, to be sure, social skills? As she is quick to acknowledge, Greta is on the spectrum; she has been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, along with obsessive compulsive disorder and selective mutism. Which is why, she explains in her TED talk, "I speak only when I feel it is necessary."

When Greta was eleven she fell into a deep depression. As the *Time* reporters write:

For months she stopped speaking almost entirely, and ate so little that she was nearly hospitalized: that period of malnutrition would later stunt her growth. Her parents took time off from work to nurse her through what her father remembers as a period of "endless sadness," and Thunberg herself recalls feeling confused. "I couldn't understand how that could exist, that existential threat, and yet we didn't prioritize it," she says. "I was maybe in a bit of denial, like, 'That can't be happening, because if that were happening, then the politicians would be taking care of it'" [p. 58].

At first her father had tried to reassure her that everything would be okay. But, "as he read more about the climate crisis, he found his own words rang hollow. 'I realized that she was right and I was wrong'" (p. 58).

Like the child in "The Tale of the Emperor's New Clothes" (in Andersen's fairy tale it's a young boy) who says what in one sense is obvious—the emperor is naked—Greta was speaking the truth: the planet is on fire.

*Time* reports:

In an effort to comfort their daughter, the family began changing their habits to reduce their emissions. They mostly stopped eating meat, installed solar panels, began growing their own vegetables and eventually gave up flying—a sacrifice for Thunberg's mother, [an opera singer] who performs throughout Europe [p. 58].

"We did all these things," her father explains, "basically not really to save the climate, we didn't care much about that initially. . . . We did it to make her happy and to get her back to life." Slowly Greta began to eat and talk again. As her father said, after she began striking, she indeed "came back to life" (p. 58).

To the annual gathering of CEOs and world leaders at Davos, Switzerland, Greta said, "I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act" (p. 54). To the members of the U.S. Congress who

rushed forward to thank her when she visited the Capitol, she said: “Don’t thank me, do something.” To the adults who chastised her for missing school and jeopardizing her future, she said, “Since you don’t give a damn about my future, I won’t either” (p. 58).

What strikes me about Thunberg is that her Asperger’s insulated her. As she herself says in her halting TED talk, “We,” meaning those on the spectrum, “aren’t very good at lying and we aren’t very interested in participating in the social game that the rest of you seem so fond of. . . . Everyone keeps saying that climate change is an existential threat and the most important issue of all, yet they keep carrying on as before. I don’t understand that. . . . We can’t save the world by playing by the rules because the rules have to be changed” (Thunberg 2018).

Greta’s Asperger’s has insulated her from an initiation that in the name of goodness or for the sake of inclusion would keep her from saying in this unadorned voice what is so patently, nakedly true. And my intention is not to romanticize Asperger’s syndrome but rather to ask: Why has this voice found such resonance?

My answer is simple: because it is a voice we recognize, a human voice. At once familiar and surprising. A voice we know and then learned to discount as naive or unpleasant. A voice that puts us on edge, in part because it leads us to question losses we may have justified as necessary and to revisit sacrifices we may have made in the name of manhood or honor or becoming a “good woman” or for the sake of having relationships and keeping the peace and making our way in the world. In a world where a man must blind himself to his vulnerability and a woman must act as though she is selfless and has no voice of her own, the human voice is a voice of resistance.

Teaching at a university, I am surprised when even now I hear a woman discount her experience as “subjective,” or deem it “selfish” to ask her real question, what *she really* wants to know, rather than asking what she has learned to think of as a good question or an important question, one prized by the authorities in her field. Just recently a student struggled after her faculty advisor told her that to draw on her own experience in framing the question for her thesis (which happened to be about women) would be “too anecdotal” and “not scientific.” He warned her that no one would take her or her work seriously. As someone invested in the seriousness of her work, I saw the need to disrupt this story.

This fall, in the seminar on resisting injustice that I co-teach with David Richards, a moral philosopher and constitution law scholar, a top

student titled his final paper: “BoysIIMen” (Uter 2019). Among his insights into the transition to manhood, the one I found most original was his perception that patriarchy “is in and of itself a form of double consciousness.” Gary Uter (when he gave me permission to quote from his paper, he asked me to use his full name) is an African American law student headed for one of New York’s most prestigious law firms. He was inspired by W. E. B. Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), where Du Bois describes the splitting of consciousness as a necessary adaptation for black folk living in a white racist society.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder [pp. 2–3].

Gary’s insight was that this is also the struggle of men in patriarchy—the two-ness, the “peculiar sensation” of being both a man and a human: “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings.” But, Gary writes, “unlike most instances of double consciousness, the patriarchal double consciousness is one where the owner of this consciousness is expected to deny its existence. Under patriarchy, a man cannot acknowledge that patriarchy is a social construct.”

In his epilogue to *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Man* (2012), Donald Moss pinpoints the moment of denial. He recalls the instant when history was rewritten. He was in the first grade and about to make an irrevocable mistake; he had started to name his favorite song when the faces of the other boys lit up in shock, telling him that he could not possibly love that song. In a flash, as he recalls it, he realized that he was “to know now *and to always have known*” (p. 140; emphasis added) what could and could not be his favorite song. In effect, he had to separate his love from his knowledge (it was, he writes, “the only song I loved”) and also to wipe out this part of his history. So that it would be as if he had always known something about himself that within himself he knew not to be true.

It is this double consciousness that Greta Thunberg lacks; chalk it up to the Asperger’s. She is single-minded. Yet it is hard to contest it when she says, tongue in cheek because she has a sense of irony, if we don’t care about her future, why should she? I hear her voice as a primal voice, a

human voice, a pre-initiated voice. It sounds familiar because we were once there, seeing the world in black and white, which is how Greta characterizes her way of seeing, before we learned that things are more complicated, that there is more than one way of looking at a problem, and yes the planet is in peril but we also have to go to school (see Bardige 1988).

I don't know how this comes up in your consulting rooms, but I suspect it must. So let me close by offering a few thoughts. Because what was initially heard as a "different voice" is in fact a human voice, it is a voice we harbor within ourselves. Because it differs from a patriarchal voice, within ourselves we contain the seeds of transformation—a way out of a highly gendered order of living held in place by men's blindness and women's silence, a conception of the world sustained by violence or the threat of violence and by silence, and that now threatens our very survival. But to encourage this voice means to contend with disruption. Greta Thunberg is not the only one saying that the rules have to be changed. Frans de Waal (2009) has called for "a complete reassessment of our assumptions about human nature" (p. 7), in part because as the evolutionary anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy (2009) observes, "patriarchal ideologies that focused on both the chastity of women and the perpetuation and augmentation of male lineages undercut the long-standing priority of putting children's well-being first" (p. 287).

The difficult part of *ezer k'negdo* is that it has to do with women and, more specifically, with relationships between women and men. When I have mentioned *ezer k'negdo* to women and especially women in long marriages to men, I don't think there has been one who didn't know instantly what I was talking about. It is something we know but something we know not to speak about. And the reason is obvious. Toni Morrison's character Paul D names it; Gary Uter, my star student in the resisting injustice seminar, explains it. I understand or at least think I understand why *ezer k'negdo* is "notoriously difficult to translate." Because we cannot know what it says. Not because it isn't true but because it would shame a man raised in a patriarchal culture to know this. As Morrison writes about Paul D, "he needed her, Sethe, to help him, to know about it, to fix it, and it shamed him to have to ask the woman he wanted to protect to help him . . ." (Morrison 1987, p. 149) because to him it meant he was not man enough to break out or fix it himself. He needed her to help him by opposing what he could not oppose himself. He needed



her “to know about it” and yet, within the dictates of patriarchy, hers was a voice he could not listen to without sacrificing his manhood.

Greta would say we are running out of time. This is a conundrum we need to solve. How can we do what as humans we now must do before it’s too late, and how can we do it without tripping the wire that blows things up by shaming manhood, which, as my husband Jim Gilligan (1997) has written, leads to violence, which then leads to blindness and to silence?

For those of us who study and teach psychology in the universities, this is an urgent call. As psychoanalysts and psychotherapists you have a wealth of experience that can be brought to bear. What happens in the consulting room when a patient breaks a silence and names the obvious? Or disrupts the accepted order of things? Or moves to dismantle the master’s house? How do you respond? In her essay “Splitting the World Open: Connection and Disconnection among Women Teaching Girls” (2018), Judith Dorney, an educator, states what for therapists is something of a truism: a “central part of the work of connection is in dealing with the crises that emerge as we move forward” (p. 341). She goes on to add that along with whatever internal conflicts and interpersonal tensions may stand in the way of connection, there are also institutional barriers, forces that “will generally work to maintain the status quo and disrupt the connections that threaten it. Certainly traditional schooling is not currently designed to hold these kinds of intense connections or to challenge the traditions and conventional power relationships” (pp. 341–342). Reflecting on the power of the Harvard Project’s Women Teaching Girls / Girls Teaching Women Retreats, which she had taken the lead in developing, Dorney concludes, “If we all had been more aware of these [institutional] patterns and forces, I believe this could have been not just a good story but a revolutionary one” (p. 342).

To me, that’s the implication of the footprints left in the sand—what turned into one might say *the* patriarchal story, the story of Adam and Eve, could have taken a very different turn, and the same is true for psychoanalysis. Because in the end Audre Lorde is right: the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. But there are other tools, and thanks in part to psychoanalysis and to feminism, we have them.

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