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[Look to the Hills: The Diary of Lozette Moreau, a French Slave Girl](#)

Posted on 21 May 2017 By Leon R. Kass

## READ KINDLE 0 The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis à eBook or Kindle ePUB free

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THE  
BEGINNING  
OF  
WISDOM



READING  
GENESIS

LEON R. KASS

*"Extraordinary. . . Its analyses and hypotheses will leave no reader's understanding of Genesis unchanged." — Edward Rothstein, New York Times*

I read through his remarks on Gen 1 11 Purposefully, he reads Genesis from a philosophically perspective and not from a covenant community He makes intriguing insights however, I m not sure one can read Genesis well from outside the community Is not Scripture to be read with the eye of faith A lion of a book I have read Genesis numerous times and I learned things and gained insights from Kass that I have never had I understand now like I never did before why Jews have retained their faith these thousands of years The Jews understand that God s promise must be passed on to the next generation As a Christian, I have never understood that This is an important book. Kass is an admirer of Mr Leo Strauss and a former bioethics adviser to Mr George W Bush His reading of Genesis is ponderously long, and it never misses a chance to announce that you and he are embarked on a wisdom seeking approach to the text Still interested Well, page after page Kass and his seminar pals he doesn t cite much secondary literature, but he does quote his students liberally generate dozens of straightforward, non tendentious insights into the text Ultimately, the wisdom seeking or Straussian approach seems to amount to two appealing views First, Genesis is best read as a piece of philosophical anthropology That is, as an account of human nature and human institutions, not as revelation, not as redaction, and not my own tendency as a repository of very gnarly tales Second, it sustains a good deal of very close reading. Here s an example When the woman she is not yet Eve responds to the serpent, she seems to make two interesting mistakes First, she says that God has forbidden her to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden But according to 2 9, it is the tree of life that has been planted there, not necessarily the tree of knowledge whose location is left ambiguous This would have seemed to me a quibble were it not that, second, the woman says that God has forbidden her not only to eat from the tree, but to touch it as well And yet in 2 17, God s interdiction refers to eating alone Do these observations add up to anything They do serve to remind us that the woman was not present when God gave the command, and they thereby suggest that the woman may have misunderstood or been misinformed by the man And this, in a small but not uninteresting way, opens up to us, in advance of the Fall, something like the possibility of language failing us this is different from the serpent s manipulation or of people simply failing one another With these points in mind, over, it is interesting to reconsider the decision to eat from the tree So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate 3 6 For one, the woman s claims are again at variance with what the reader knows about the garden She sees that the tree is good for food But 2 9 seems to distinguish the trees of life and knowledge from those that are pleasant to sight and good for food rather than to include them in their number But second, and importantly, Kass notices that the woman has determined in advance of moving to eat from the tree that the tree is good Good for food It is in fact her own ability to recognize goodness simply on the basis of the visual evidence presumably, she is comparing this tree to others which it resembles and which are themselves good for

food, and thus not the serpent's ambiguous claims, that justify her decision to eat. And the thing Kass observes here and, who knows, I am sure he is not the first, but Jack Miles certainly missed it, and so did my Sunday School teacher is that the whole point of eating from the tree was to gain knowledge of good and bad. In claiming to know that the tree is good before she has learned what goodness is, the woman is thus committing a profound sort of error. And Kass seems right to say that the error is her implicit assumption that her use of reason—observing, comparing, sorting, classing—is a reliable path to truth. One might go on to say that her attempt to reason herself into the very pursuit of reasoning, into the knowledge of good and evil, shows us something profound about the risks of foundationalism in philosophy or a related case of the difficulties we run into when we try to give ourselves reasons to be rational. But that would take us pretty far out of Eden. All my life I have heard wise old men say things like, "I've been studying the Bible all my life, and it seems like every year I learn how little I know." I didn't feel like that. I felt like my Bible study was taking me somewhere I felt like I was making progress, like the day couldn't be too far off that I would really know the Bible inside and out. Then I read *The Beginning of Wisdom* and I understood what all those wise old men were talking about. I have known the Genesis stories all my life. I can't remember learning them, because I can't remember not knowing them. But I realized, reading this book in my late 30s, that I had no idea what those stories are about. I had often heard the Bible compared to mythology, and I misunderstood that term. I thought of popular writing that lists myths and facts of exercise or healthy eating or whatever, in which myth means mistake, or widely held belief that is demonstrably false. I thought that was what people meant when they called the Bible mythological—that it isn't true. Early on, Kass says of Genesis, "These stories are so powerful, not because they tell us what happened, but because they tell us what always happens." And that one sentence opened my eyes. Now I know for sure I will never get to the bottom of the Bible. There will always be for me to learn.

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