

**Overview of Daniel Quinn's book, *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit* (Bantam, 1992)**

**This provides background for better understanding the movie 'Instinct' (recommended), as well as the assigned novel, *The Story of B*, for this is the story of how B came to be B.**

- Background: Gorilla "Ishmael" was caught and in captivity since he was young; finally purchased by a holocaust survivor and becomes learned, and can communicate telepathically.
- Ishmael tutors burnt out old activist in long, Socratic, telepathic dialogue. The driving question of their dialogue was 'Why are things the way they are?' The book was written in the voice of the student/narrator, who learns the following along the way:
- 'Mother culture' – the main stories agri-cultures tell themselves – which justify their expansion and domination of all other organisms as well as indigenous / foraging / small-scale pastoral cultures. Agricultures are dubbed 'takers' and foraging societies 'leavers'. Leavers obey the laws of nature, Takers have become enemies of life.
- Takers are captive to the narratives of 'mother culture' – they are unhappy and unfulfilled – in their high stress striving and consumerism.
- Key focus: Mother Culture's creation myth: the World was made for human beings. Human Takers conquer the earth and its creatures and bend nature to its use and are convinced they are justified in doing so. But in so doing, they've become 'the enemy of the world.'
- Rejecting and replacing Mother Culture's creation myth is critical; to do this, see the real meaning of "The Fall" and of the Cain and Abel Story:
  - The Fall: It is a leaver story, foraging society as paradise, as agriculture as the advent of agriculture and all the toil and suffering that comes with it. If it had been a Taker/agricultural story, it would not have been called "the fall" but framed positively, as the ascent or some other progressive term.
    - These agricultures think they have a right to spread everywhere, that their ways are the way everyone should live.
    - These agricultures have been spreading every sense and wherever they go cultural and biological diversity decline.
  - Cain and Abel: Cain was the agricultural 'tiller of the ground' and his sacrifice was not acceptable to God. Able was the pastoralist and his offerings were acceptable. Cain killed Able and was exiled from Eden. Cain and Able symbolize murderous agriculture and peaceful, pastoral/foraging lifeways.
  - Takers' gods tricked the Takers in three ways: First, they're (the Takers) not the center of the universe, though they act like they are. Second, humans evolved just like everything else, even though they feel above evolution. And third, that they're not actually exempt from the laws of life.
  - In other words, Takers are exceeding the carrying capacity of the planet is the result: perpetual population growth, famine, inequality, insecurity,

unnecessary violence and suffering; and even the collapse of agricultural civilizations is the result. Unlike with Native American cultures, e.g., where populations and geographic areas remain bounded.

**Summary: the story of The Fall and Cain and Abel were tools Semites used to explain the expansion of agriculture and the people who threatened their way of life.**

- Leavers, in contrast to takers, live according the laws of nature. These laws can be learned by observing living organisms. Specifically: The three basic rules are
  - 1) do not exterminate your competition for food;
  - 2) do not destroy your competitors' food supply in order to grow your own; and
  - 3) do not deny access to food to others.
    - These rules promote diversity and survival for the community as a whole, favoring no species above the rest. The humanitarian instinct to supply calories to starving people does not solve the problem of starvation but can make it worse.
- To overcome the power of the taker story people must embrace and evolutionary understanding of the human place in the history of life, recognize their kinship with all organisms, and that they belong to the world and are not set apart from it to be masters of it. To do this, the enslaving and destructive narrative of the taker Mother Culture Ishmael must be overcome. Ishmael told the narrator at the end of the book that, since human understandings must change before their behaviors will, it is his responsibility to become a teacher and carry forth what he had learned into his Taker culture. This is where *The Story of B* takes off.

For the Wikipedia entry, see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishmael\\_\(novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ishmael_(novel))