

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE DUAL NATURE OF MAN

1. According to Jewish doctrines, man is formed by a union of two natures: the flesh, which he shares with all the animals, and the spirit, which renders him a child of God. The former is rooted in the earth and is earthward bent; the latter is a "breath from God" and strives to unfold the divine in man until he attains the divine image. This discord brings a tremendous internal conflict, leading from one historic stage to another, achieving ever higher things, intellectual, moral, and spiritual, until at last the whole earth is to be a divine kingdom, the dwelling-place of truth, goodness, and holiness.

2. According to the Biblical view man consists of flesh (*basar*) and spirit (*ruah*). The term *flesh* is used impartially of all animals, hence the Biblical term "all flesh" ¹ includes both man and beast. The body becomes a living being by being penetrated with the "breath of life" (*ruah hayim*), at whose departure the living body turns at once into a lifeless clod. This breath of life is possessed by the animal as well as by man, as both of them breathe the air. Hence in ancient tongues "breath" and "soul" are used as synonyms, as the Hebrew *nefesh* and *neshamah*, the Latin *anima* and *spiritus*, the Greek *pneuma* and *psyche*. A different primitive belief connected the soul with the blood, noting that man or beast dies when the hot life-blood flows out of the body, so that we read in the Bible, "the blood is the soul." ² In this

¹ Gen. VI, 12, 19.

² Gen. IX, 21; Lev. XVII, 11, 14.

the soul is identified with the life, while the word *ruah*, denoting the moving force of the air, is used more in the sense of spirit or soul as distinct from the body.

Thus both man and beast possess a soul, *nefesh*. The soul of man is merely distinguished by its richer endowment, its manifold faculties by which it is enabled to move forward to higher things. Thus the animal soul is bound for all time to its destined place, while the divine spirit in man makes him a free creative personality, self-conscious and god-like. For this reason the creation of man forms a special act in the account in Genesis. Both the plant and animal worlds rose at God's bidding from the soil of mother earth, and the soul of the animal is limited in origin and goal by the earthly sphere. The creation of man inaugurates a new world. God is described as forming the body of man from the dust of the earth and then breathing His spirit into the lifeless frame, endowing it with both life and personality. The whole man, both body and soul, has thus the potentiality of a higher and nobler life.

3. Accordingly Scripture does not have a thorough-going dualism, of a carnal nature which is sinful and a spiritual nature which is pure. We are not told that man is composed of an impure earthly body and a pure heavenly soul, but instead that the whole of man is permeated by the spirit of God. Both body and soul are endowed with the power of continuous self-improvement. In order to see the great superiority of the Jewish view over the heathen one, we need only study the old Babylonian legend preserved by Berosus. In this the deity made man by mixing earth with some of its own life-blood, thus endowing the human soul with higher powers. In the Bible the difference between man and beast does not lie in the blood, although the blood is still thought to be the life. The distinction of man is in the spirit, *ruah*, which emanates from God and penetrates both body and soul,

lifting the whole man into a higher realm and making him a free moral personality.

Still the Bible makes no clear distinction between the three terms, *nefesh*, *neshamah*, and *ruah*.¹ Philo first distinguished between three different substances of the soul, but his theory was the Platonic one, for which he simply used the three Biblical names.² The Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages, beginning with Saadia, took the same attitude, even though they realized more or less that the division of the soul into three substances has no Scriptural warrant.³ In rabbinical literature this division is scarcely known, and there is little mention of either the animal soul, *nefesh*, or the vital spark, *ruah*. Instead the word *neshamah* is used for the human *psyche* as the higher spiritual substance, and the contrast to it is not the Biblical *basar*, flesh, but the Aramaic *guph*, body.⁴ This bears a trace of Persian dualism, with its strong contrast between the earthly body and the heavenly soul.

4. In fact, rabbinical Judaism does not recognize any relationship between the soul of the animal and that of man, but claims that man has a special type of existence. The Midrash tells⁵ that God formed Adam's body so as to reach from earth to heaven, and then caused the soul to enter it. In the same way God implants the soul into the embryo before its birth and while in the womb. Before this the soul had a bird-like existence in an immense celestial cage (*guph* = *columbarium*), and when it leaves the body in death, it again takes

¹ See Dillmann, l. c., 355-361; Davidson, l. c., 182-203; comp. Gen. R. XIV, 11, where these three terms are given, and also *yehidah*, Ps. XXII, 21; XXXV, 17, and *hayah*, Ps. XCLIII, 3; Job XXXIII, 1.

² De Leg. Alleg. III, 38.

³ See Horowitz: *D. Psychologie Saadias*; Scheyer: *D. psycholog. System d. Maimonides*; Cassel's *Cuzari*, p. 382-400; Husik, l. c., IX, 41; and see also Index: *Soul*.

⁴ Sanh. 91 a, b; Nid. 30 b-31 b; Sifre Deut. 306, ref. to Deut. XXXII, 1; Lev. IV, 5-8.

⁵ Ab. Z. 5 a; Gen. R. VIII, 1.

its flight toward heaven. There its conduct on earth will reap a reward in the garden of eternal bliss or a punishment in the infernal regions. The belief in the preëxistence of the soul was shared by the rabbis with the apocryphal authors and Philo.¹

However, rabbinical Judaism never followed Philo so far in the footsteps of Plato as to consider the body or the flesh the source of impurity and sin, or "the prison house of the soul." This view is fundamental in the Paulinian system of other-worldliness. For the rabbis the sensuous desire of the body (*yezer*) is a tendency toward sin, but never a compulsion. The weakness of the flesh may cause a straying from the right path, but man can turn the desires of the flesh into the service of the good. He can always assert his divine power of freedom by opposing the evil inclination (*yezer ha ra*) with the good inclination (*yezer ha tob*) to overcome it.² In fact, the rabbis are so far from acknowledging the existence of a compulsion of evil in the flesh, that they point to the history of great men as proof that the highest characters have the mightiest passions in their souls, and that their greatness consists in the will by which they have learned to control themselves.³

5. In the light of modern science the whole theory separating body and soul falls to the ground, and the one connecting man more closely with the animal world is revived. In this connection we think of the idea which medieval thinkers adopted from Plato and Aristotle, that there is a substance of souls — *nefesh hakiyonith* — which forms the basic life-

¹ B. Wisdom, VIII, 20; Slav. Enoch XXIII, 5; Philo I, 15, 32; II, 356; comp. Bousset, l. c., p. 508 f.

² Gen. VI, 5; VIII, 21; B. Sira XV, 14; XVII, 31; XXI, 11; Ber. 5 a; Kid. 30 b; Suk. 52 a, b; Shab. 152 b; Eccl. R. XII, 7; comp. F. Ch. Porter: "The Yezer ha Ra" in *Biblical and Semitic Studies*, 93-156; Bousset, l. c., 462 f.

³ Suk. 52 a, b.

force of men and animals. Physiology and psychology reveal the interaction and dependence of body and soul in the lowest forms of animal life as well as in the higher forms, including man. The beginnings of the human mind must be sought once for all in the animal, just as the origin of the animal reaches back into the plant world. Indeed, Aristotle anticipates the discoveries of modern science, placing the vegetative and animal souls beside the spirit of man. Thus motion and sensibility form the lower boundary-line of the animal kingdom, and self-consciousness and self-determination are the criteria of humanity.

Yet this very self-conscious freedom which forms man's personality, his *ego*, lifts him into a realm of free action under higher motives, transcending nature's law of necessity, and therefore not falling within the domain of natural science. Dust-born man, notwithstanding his earthly limitations, in spite of his kinship to mollusk and mammal, enters the realm of the divine spirit. In the Midrash the rabbis remark that man shares the nature of both animals and angels.¹ Admitting this, we feel that he is tied neither to heaven nor to the earth, but free to lift himself above all creatures or sink below them all.

6. Endowed with this dual nature, man stands in the very center of the universe, and God esteems him "equal in value to the entire creation," as Rabbi Nehemiah says of a single human soul.² Rabbi Akiba stresses the image of God in humanity when he says: "Beloved is man, for he is created in God's image, and it was a special token of love that he became conscious of it. Beloved is Israel, for they are called the children of God, and it was a special token of love that they became conscious of it."³ The Midrash compares man to God in exquisite manner: "Just as God permeates the world and carries it, unseen yet seeing all, enthroned

¹ Gen. R. VIII, 11.

² Ab. d. R. N. XXXI.

³ Aboth III, 18.

within as the Only One, the Perfect, and the Pure, yet never to be reached or found out; so the soul penetrates and carries the body, as the *one* pure and luminous being which sees and holds all things, while itself unseen and unreached."¹ The conception of the soul is here divested of every sensory attribute, and portrayed as a divine force within the body. This conception, which was accepted by the medieval philosophers, is thoroughly consistent with our view of the world. The soul it is which mirrors both the material and spiritual worlds and holds them in mutual relation through its own power. It is at the same time swayed upward and downward by its various cravings, heavenly and earthly, and this very tension constitutes the dual nature of the human soul.

¹ Ber. 10 a; Midr. Teh. Ps. CIII, 4-5.