

Two Views of Man

Should we inquire of a modern historian of philosophy or of any educated person well acquainted with the history of ideas what he understands by the word "man," he would immediately advise us about a basic controversy concerning the destiny or essence of this being. By the sheer force of associative thinking, he would at once refer to three disparate anthropological-philosophical viewpoints: the Biblical (referred to by many as the Judeo-Christian view), the classical Greek, and the modern empirico-scientific. Pressed further, he would probably say that the discrepancy between the concepts of man dating back to antiquity – the Biblical and the classical Greek – is by far not as wide as the gap separating those two from the empirico-scientific one. As a matter of fact, he would say, we may speak of some degree of affinity, of commensurability between the Biblical and classical anthropologies. Both are united in opposition to the scientific approach to man: they set man apart from other forms of organic life.

...

It is certain that the fathers of the Church and also the Jewish medieval scholars believed that the Bible preached this doctrine. Medieval and even modern Jewish moralists have almost canonized this viewpoint and attributed to it apodictic validity. Yet the consensus of many, however great and distinguished, does not prove the truth or falseness of a particular belief. I have always felt that due to some erroneous conception, we have actually misunderstood the Judaic anthropology and read into the Biblical texts ideas which stem from an alien source. This feeling becomes more pronounced when we try to read the Bible not as an isolated literary text but as a manifestation of a grand tradition rooted in the very essence of our God-consciousness that transcends the bounds of the standardized and fixed text and fans out into every aspect of our existential experience. The sooner Biblical texts are placed in their proper setting – namely, the Oral Tradition with its almost endless religious awareness – the clearer and more certain I am that Judaism does not accent unreservedly the theory of man's isolationism and separatism within the natural order of things.

1. Genesis 1–2

^{1:11}And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ... ²⁰God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ... ²⁴God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. ... ^{2:7}the LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

2. Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, p. 12

Man in the story of creation does not occupy a unique ontic position. He is, rather, a drop of the cosmos that fits into the schemata of naturalness and concreteness. ... The viewpoint is very much akin to modern science. Christianity split the story of creation in two, and analysed the story of man without taking cognizance of that of animal and plant. That is why it arrived at half-truths and misinterpreted the Biblical anthropology.

3. Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, p. 16

Concerning his entire physiologico-biological functional system – breathing, assimilation of organic matter, circulation of blood, glandular secretion, and so on – man does not differ from the plant.

4. Deuteronomy 20:19–20

When in your war against a city you have to besiege it a long time in order to capture it, you must not destroy its trees, wielding the ax against them. You may eat of them, but you must not cut them down. Are trees of the field human to withdraw before you into the besieged city? Only trees that you know do not yield food may be destroyed; you may cut them down for constructing siegeworks against the city that is waging war on you, until it has been reduced.

5. Genesis 1:29–30

God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so.

1. ספר בראשית פרקים א–ב

^{1:11}וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְשָׂא הָאָרֶץ דִּשְׂאָ עֵשֶׂב מִזֵּרַע וְזֶרַע עֵץ פְּרִי עֵשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינֹו אֲשֶׁר וְזָרְעוּבוּ עַל-הָאָרֶץ וַיְהִי-כֵן...²⁰וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָצוּ הַמַּיִם שָׂרָץ גֹּפֶשׁ חַיָּה וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל-הָאָרֶץ עַל-פְּנֵי רְקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם: ...²⁴וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ גֹּפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ וְחַיֵּת-אָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן: ...^{2:7}וַיִּיצֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם עֹפֵר מִן-הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְגֹפֶשׁ חַיָּה:

4. ספר דברים פרק כ פסוקים יט–כ

כִּי-תִצּוֹר אֶל-עִיר יָמִים רַבִּים לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ לְתַפְשׂוֹתָ לְאֶ-תְּשַׁחִית אֶת-עֵצֶיהָ לְנִדָּח עָלָיו גֵּרֹן כִּי מִמֶּנּוּ תֹאכַל וְאִתּוֹ לֹא תִכְרֹת כִּי הָאָדָם עֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה לְבָא מִפְּנֵיהָ בַמִּצּוֹר: וְכִּי עֵץ אֲשֶׁר-תִּדְעַ כִּי-לֹא-עֵץ מֵאֲכָל הוּא אִתּוֹ תִשְׁחִית וְכִרְתָּ וּבְנֵיתָ מִצּוֹר עַל-הָעִיר אֲשֶׁר-הוּא עֵשֶׂה עִמָּךְ מִלְחָמָה עַד רִדְתָּהּ:

5. ספר בראשית פרק א פסוקים כט–ל

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה נֹתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב | וְזֶרַע וְזֶרַע אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בוּ פְרִי-עֵץ וְזֶרַע וְזֶרַע לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֲכֹלָהּ: וְלְכָל-חַיֵּת הָאָרֶץ וְלְכָל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְלְכָל | רֹמֵשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר-בוּ גֹפֶשׁ חַיָּה אֶת-כָּל-יִרְקַע עֵשֶׂב לְאֲכֹלָהּ וַיְהִי-כֵן:

6. ספר ויקרא פרק יז פסוקים ג-ד

6. Leviticus 17:3-4

if anyone of the house of Israel slaughters an ox or sheep or goat in the camp, or does so outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD, before the LORD's Tabernacle, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man: he has shed blood; that man shall be cut off from among his people.

אִישׁ אִישׁ מִבֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט שׂוֹר אוֹ-כֶּשֶׁב אוֹ-עֵז
בַּמַּחֲנֶה אוֹ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁחַט מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה: וְאֶל-פֶּתַח אֹהֶל
מוֹעֵד לֹא הֵבִיאוּ לְהִקְרִיב קָרְבָן לַיהוָה לִפְנֵי מִשְׁכַּן יְהוָה
דָּם יִחָשֵׁב לְאִישׁ הַהוּא דָם שָׁפָךְ וְנִכְרַת הָאִישׁ הַהוּא מִקְרֵב
עַמּוֹ:

7. Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, pp. 44-47

That all organic existence is on one continuum is a postulate of Judaism. But the Torah does not apply uniform standards to all organic life. Human life is evaluated as the apex of the bio-pyramid – what was termed *tzelem* – and plant at its base. But the difference consists only in degree, not in kind. ... Man may be the most developed form of life on the continuum of plant-animal-man, but the ontic essence remains identical.

8. Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, p. 63

Man *should* create new life; he *should* plant trees and engage in such creative work. The intimate close contact with the environment was recommended and approved by Judaism. The Jew whom God called upon was a worker, a farmer, a shepherd; men who lived in harmony and at peace with nature and saw God not in transcendent heavens, but descending from infinity into finitude. They had spoken to Him as to their fellow-men, in a friendly, neighborly fashion. To cultivate the ground means to worship: *avodah*. In it is expressed man's loyalty to himself and to his destiny.

9. Max Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature* (trans. Hans Meyerhoff) p. 5

If we ask an educated person in the Western world what he means by the word "man," three irreconcilable ways of thinking are apt to come into conflict in his mind. The first is the Jewish-Christian tradition of Adam and Eve, including creation, paradise, and fall. The second is the Greek tradition in which, for the first time, man's self-consciousness raised him to a unique place on the grounds that he is endowed with "reason." ... The third idea is that of modern science and genetic psychology, which also has a tradition of its own. According to this view, man is a very recent product of evolution on our planet, a creature distinguished from its antecedents in the animal world only by the degree of complexity of energies and capacities already present on a subhuman level. These three ideas are not compatible with each other. Thus we have a scientific, a philosophical, and a theological anthropology in complete separation from one another.