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God's Perspective on Man

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Philosophy and science are both bafflingly inclusive in their subject-matter. Yet each of these disciplines is essentially an attempt to answer a simple question.

Taken in its broadest sense, science is dedicated to the task of answering that question which perpetually haunts our minds, "How?" A simple question indeed! But to explain how grass grows on our earth or how a machine functions or how galaxies zoom through the vast emptiness of space has been one of the great enterprises of modern civilization, perhaps its greatest. On the other hand, philosophy, taken in its broadest sense, is also dedicated to the task of answering a simple question which never quits plaguing us, "Why?"

Though the why-question like the how-question is deceptively simple, it often teases us nearly out of thought. So, for example, a child asks innocently, "Why was anything at all?"--and the sages are reduced to silence.

We who are amateurs in the philosophical enterprise find ourselves bewildered as we glance at its profusion of rival schools and listen to their in-group jargon. Fortunately, though, one of its most illustrious practitioners, Immanuel Kant, provides us with helpful orientation. In the Handbook which he prepared for the students who studied with him at the University of Koenigsburg a century and a half ago, Kant points out that philosophy, a disciplined attempt to explain why, concerns itself with four key-problems.¹ First, what can we know? Second, what ought we do? Third, what may we hope? Fourth, what is man? In a way that last question, "What is man?", the problem of anthropology or the nature of human nature, includes the other three. For man is that curious creature who

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insists on asking questions. Man is that unique animal who tirelessly cross examines himself about himself. Man is that relentless interrogator who probingly wonders what he can know and what he ought to do and what he may hope. Philosophy, therefore, twists and turns around the person and the philosopher. Every question he raises is inescapably enmeshed with the question concerning himself as the questioner, "What is man?"

The fourth key-problem in Kant's succinct outline of philosophy echoes a recurrent Biblical theme. In

Job 7:17 that very question appears. In Psalm 8:4 that question re-emerges, and Hebrews 2:5 repeats that same question. Thus we are not surprised that philosophy, which like theology is a why discipline, puts anthropology or the problem of man front and center. But whether we label ourselves philosophers or theologians or scientists, every one of us is a human being who grapples with the issue of self-identity, Hence the question, "What is man?", concerns us individually at the deepest levels of our existence; for that question is really the haunting question, "Who am I?"

Man as Garbage

Before proceeding to present God's perspective on man, which can be done only because we presuppose that the Bible is God's Word spoken to us through human words, let me remind you of some competing models of man that are widely accepted today. There is of course the purely materialistic concept which holds that man is nothing but, as Bertrand Russell elegantly phrased it, an accidental collocation of atoms. This concept, though advanced with the blessing of contemporary science, is by no means excitingly novel. In the 18th century self-styled *illuminati* scoffed that man is nothing but an ingenious system of portable plumbing. In pre-Hitler Germany an unflattering devaluation of *Homo sapiens* was jokingly circulated: "The human body contains enough fat to make 7 bars of soap, enough iron to make a medium sized nail, enough phosphorus for 2000 matchheads, and enough sulphur to rid oneself of fleas." When human bodies were later turned into soap in the extermination camps, the grim logic of that joke was probably being worked out to its ultimate conclusion.

Today, tragically, that concept, apparently certified by science, is articulated by a celebrated novelist like Joseph Heller. In *Catch 22* he describes a battle. Yossarian, the book's hero, discovers that Snowden, one of

his comrades, has been mortally wounded. Hoping that none of us will be unduly nauseated by it, I quote this vivid passage.

Yossarian ripped open the snaps of Snowden's flack suit and heard himself scream wildly as Snowden's insides slithered down to the floor in a soggy pile and just kept dripping out. A chunk of flack more than three inches big had shot into his other side just underneath the arm and blasted all the way through, drawing whole mottled quarts of Snowden along with it through the gigantic hole it made in his ribs as it blasted out. Yossarian screamed a second time and squeezed both hands over his eyes. His teeth were chattering in horror. He forced himself to look again. Here was God's plenty all right, he thought bitterly as he stared-liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes Snowden had eaten that day for lunch. Yossarian . . . turned away dizzily and began to vomit, clutching his burning throat. . .

"I'm cold," Snowden whimpered. "I'm cold."

"There, there," Yossarian mumbled mechanically in a voice too low to be heard. "There, there."

Yossarian was cold too, and shivering uncontrollably. He felt goose pimples clacking all over him as he gazed down despondently at the grim secret Snowden had spilled all over the messy floor. It was easy to read the message in his entrails. Man was matter, that was Snowden's secret. Drop him out a window and he'd fall. Set fire to him and he'll burn. Bury him and he'll rot like other kinds of garbage. The spirit gone, man is garbage. That was Snowden's secret.²

Man is garbage. That, crudely stated, is a common view of human nature today. In the end, man is garbage-

an accidental collocation of atoms, destined, sooner or later, to rot and decay. To guard against any misunderstanding, let me say emphatically that from one perspective man is indeed garbage or will be. That appraisal is incontestably valid, provided man is not viewed as garbage and nothing but that. Man has other dimensions to his being which no full-orbed anthropology can ignore.

Man as Machine

A second concept, apparently endorsed by science, holds that man is essentially a machine, an incredibly complicated machine, no doubt, yet in the end nothing but a sort of mechanism. Typical is the opinion of Cambridge astronomer, Fred Hoyle, who writes in *The Nature of the Universe*:

Only the biological processes of mutation and natural selection are needed to produce living creatures as we know them. Such creatures are no more than ingenious machines that have evolved as strange by-products in an odd corner of the universe. . . . Most people object to this argument for the not very good reason that they do not like to think of themselves as machines.³

Like it or not, however, Hoyle insists, that is the fact. What is man? An ingenious machine-well, a whole complex of machines. R. Buckminster Fuller, whose genius seems to belie the truth of reductive mechanism, pictures man as

a self-balancing, 28 jointed, adapter-based biped, an electro-chemical reduction plant, integral with the segregated storages of special energy extracts in storage batteries, for the subsequent actuation of thousands of hydraulic and pneumatic pumps, with motors attached; 62,000 miles of capillaries, millions of warning signals, railroad and conveyor systems; crushers and cranes. . .

and a universally distributed telephone system needing no service for seventy years if well managed; the whole extraordinary complex mechanism guided with exquisite precision from a turret in which are located telescopic and microscopic self-registering and recording range finders, a spectroscope, et cetera.⁴

That man from one perspective is a complex of exquisitely synchronized machines cannot be denied and need not be, provided human beings are not exhaustively reduced to that, and nothing but that. Man has other dimensions to his being which no full-orbed anthropology can ignore.

Man as Animal

Still another current concept of man holds that he is essentially an animal. Loren Eiseley, a distinguished scientist whose prose often reads like poetry, eloquently sets forth this model of humanity in his 1974 *Encyclopedia Britannica* article, "The Cosmic Orphan." What is man? He is a cosmic orphan, a primate which has evolved into a self-conscious, reflective, symbol-using animal. Man is a cosmic orphan, a person aware that he has been produced, unawares and unintentionally, by an impersonal process. Thus when this cosmic orphan inquires, "Who am I?", science gives him its definitive answer.

You are a changeling. You are linked by a genetic chain to all the vertebrates. The thing that is you bears the still-aching wounds of evolution in body and in brain. Your hands are made-over fins, your lungs come from a swamp, your femur has been twisted upright. Your foot is a re-worked climbing pad. You are a rag doll re sewn from the skins of extinct animals. Long ago, 2 million

years perhaps, you were smaller; your brain was not so large. We are not confident that you could speak. Seventy million years before that you were an even smaller climbing creature known as a tupaiid. You were the size of a rat. You ate insects. Now you fly to the moon.

Science, when pressed, admits that its explanation is a fairy tale. But immediately science adds:

That is what makes it true. Life is indefinite departure. That is why we are all orphans. That is why you must find your own way. Life is not stable. Everything alive is slipping through cracks and crevices in time, changing as it goes. Other creatures, however, have instincts that provide for them, holes in which to hide. They cannot ask questions. A fox is a fox, a wolf is a wolf, even if this, too, is illusion. You have learned to ask questions. That is why you are an orphan. You are the only creation in the universe who knows what it has been. Now you must go on asking questions while all the time you are changing. You will ask what you are to become. The world will no longer satisfy you. You must find your way, your own true self. "But how can I?" wept the Orphan, hiding his head. "This is magic. I do not know what I am. I have been too many things." "You have indeed," said all the scientists together.

Something still more must be appended, though, science insists as it explains man to himself.

Your body and your nerves have been dragged about and twisted in the long effort of your ancestors to stay alive, but now, small orphan that you are, you must know a secret, a secret magic that nature has given you. No other creature on the planet possesses it. You use language. You are a symbol-shifter. All this is hidden in your brain and transmitted from one generation to another. You are a time-binder; in your head the symbols

that mean things in the world outside can fly about untrammelled. You can combine them differently into a new world of thought, or you can also hold them tenaciously throughout a life-time and pass them on to others.⁵

Expressed in Eiseley's semi-poetic prose, this concept, while confessedly a fairy tale, has about it an aura of not only plausibility but nobility as well. Sadly, however, when man is reduced to an animal and nothing but an animal, the aura of nobility vanishes and bestiality starts to push humanity into the background. Think of man as portrayed in contemporary art and literature and drama. Take, illustratively, the anthropology which underlies the work of a popular playwright like Tennessee Williams. What is the Good News preached by this evangelist, as he calls himself? His Gospel, interpreted by Robert Fitch, is this:

Man is a beast. The only difference between man and the other beasts is that man is a beast that knows he will die. The only honest man is the unabashed egotist. This honest man pours contempt upon the mendacity, the lies, the hypocrisy of those who will not acknowledge their egotism. The one irreducible value is life, which you must cling to as you can and use for the pursuit of pleasure and of power. The specific ends of life are sex and money. The great passions are lust and rapacity. So the human comedy is an outrageous medley of lechery, alcoholism, homosexuality, blasphemy, greed, brutality, hatred, obscenity. It is not a tragedy because it has not the dignity of a tragedy. The man who plays his role in it has on himself the marks of a total depravity. And as for the ultimate and irreducible value, life, that in the end is also a lie.⁶

These, then, are three contemporary models of man,

all of them rooted in a philosophy of reductive naturalism. First, man is nothing but matter en route to becoming garbage. Second, man is nothing but a complex of exquisitely synchronized machines. Third, man is nothing but an animal, a mutation aware that, as a cosmic orphan, it lives and dies in melancholy loneliness.

Man as God's Creature

Now over against these views let us look at man from God's perspective, unabashedly drawing our anthropology from the Bible. As we do so, please bear in mind that we are not disputing those valid insights into the nature of human nature which are derived from philosophy, no less than science. Suppose, too, we take for granted that psychology and sociology are properly included within the scientific orbit. In other words, we are assuming that man is multidimensional and that anthropology therefore requires God's input if it is to give us a full-orbed picture of its subject. To begin with, then, the Bible asserts that man is God's creature. So in Genesis 2:1 this statement is made: "The Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul." Exactly how God formed man Genesis does not tell us; it does tell us, though, that man is not an accident, a happenstance, a personal mutation ground out by an impersonal process. On the contrary, Genesis tells us explicitly that man owes his existence to God's limitless power, wisdom, and love. It tells us explicitly that man-dust inbreathed by deity-cannot be explained except in terms of creaturehood. Which means what? As creature, man is qualitatively different from God, utterly dependent upon God, and ultimately determined by His creator. It is God Who determines man's nature and determines, likewise, the laws and limits of human existence. Obviously, the implications of this Creator-creature

relationship are enormous. Few reductive naturalists have perceived them as penetratingly as Jean-Paul Sartre, the foremost spokesman for atheistic existentialism now living. Realizing what follows if indeed man has been made by God, Sartre repudiates the very notion of creation. Understandably so! If there is no Creator, then there is no fixed human nature, and man has unbounded freedom. He can decide who he will be and what he will do. That is why Sartre postulates atheism without stopping to argue for it.

Atheistic existentialism, which I represent, states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or, as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that, first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene, and, only afterwards, defines himself. If man, as the existentialist conceives him, is indefinable, it is because at first he is nothing. Only afterward will he be something, and he himself will have made what he will be. Thus, there is no human nature, since there is no God to conceive it. Not only is man what he conceives himself to be, but he is also only what he wills himself to be after this thrust toward existence. . . . If existence really does precede essence, there is no ex-

plaining things away by reference to a fixed and given human nature. In other words, there is no determinism, man is free, man is freedom. On the other hand, if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct. So, in the bright realm of values, we have no excuse behind us, nor justification before us. We are alone, with no excuses.⁷

Thus in Sartre's opinion only if man is not a creature can he be genuinely free, free to shape his own nature, free to run his own life, free to pick and choose his own values. And Sartre is right. Grant that man is a creature, and you must grant that he can never sign a declaration of independence, cutting himself free from God. He is inseparably related to God, finding fulfillment and obedience to his Maker's will. Hence Paul Tillich, in tacit agreement with Sartre, argues that the modern repudiation of God springs from man's fierce desire to renounce his creaturely status. In Tillich's own words:

God as a subject makes me into an object which is nothing more than an object. He deprives me of my subjectivity because he is all-powerful and all-knowing. I revolt and try to make him into an object, but the revolt fails and becomes desperate. God appears as the invincible tyrant, the being in contrast with whom all other beings are without freedom and subjectivity. He is equated with the recent tyrants who with the help of terror try to transform everything into a mere object, a thing among things, a cog in the machine they control. He becomes the model of every thing against which Existentialism revolted. This is the God Nietzsche said had to be killed because nobody can tolerate being made into a mere object of absolute knowledge and absolute control. This is the deepest root of atheism.⁸

Tillich, alas, grossly misconceives the Creator-creature relationship; but one thing he profoundly apprehends. Man as God's creature can never sign a declaration of independence from his Creator. That is the basic fact of human existence.

Man as God's Image

In the next place, the Bible asserts that man is *God's image*. Genesis 1:26 announces this second momentous fact of human existence rather undramatically. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." To interpret the full significance of the intriguing phrase, the image of God, is plainly beyond my competence. But its central thrust is undebatable. Man was created not only by God and for God but also like God. He was created a finite person reflecting the being of infinite Personhood. Qualitatively different from God and absolutely dependent upon his Creator, man was endowed with the capacity of responding to the divine Person in love and obedience and trust, enjoying a fellowship of unimaginable beatitude.

My purpose is not to defend the audacious claim that the unimpressive biped whom Desmond Morris labels the naked ape is indeed God's image. But that audacious claim loses at least some of its initial incredibility when one takes into account man's extraordinary characteristics. These have been succinctly summarized by Mortimer J. Adler in that study, *The Difference of Man and the Difference It Makes*, which challenges reductive naturalism to rethink its inadequate anthropology.

1. Only man employs a propositional language, only man uses verbal symbols, only man makes sentences; i.e., only man is a discursive animal.
2. Only man makes tools, builds fires, erects shelters, fabricates clothings; i.e., only man is a technological animal.

3. Only man enacts laws or sets up his own rules of behavior and thereby constitutes his social life, organizing his association with his fellows in a variety of different ways; i.e., only man is a political, not just a gregarious, animal.
4. Only man has developed, in the course of generations, a cumulative cultural tradition, the transmission of which constitutes human history; i.e., only man is a historical animal.
5. Only man engages in magical and ritualistic practices; i.e., only man is a religious animal.
6. Only man has a moral conscience, a sense of right and wrong, and of values; i.e., only man is an ethical animal.
7. Only man decorates or adorns himself or his artifacts, and makes pictures or statues for the non-utilitarian purpose of enjoyment; i.e., only man is an aesthetic animal.⁹

Man, the animal who is discursive, technological, political, historical, religious, ethical, and aesthetic, certainly seems unique enough to lend some plausibility to the Biblical claim that he was created in God's image. That audacious claim, which does not impress Adler as preposterous, also receives powerful endorsement from the well-known physicist, William G. Pollard. How better, he inquires, can man be designated than the image of God? His cogent argument for this position cannot now be rehearsed; but his conclusion, it seems to me, deserves to be heard even by those of us who are anti-evolutionists:

Starting from the perspective of the mid-twentieth century, we are able to see two very fundamental aspects of the phenomenon of man which would not have been evident before. One of these is the conversion of the biosphere into the noosphere. The other is the miraculous correspondence between the fabrications of man's mind

and the inner design of nature, as evidenced by the applicability of abstract mathematical systems to the laws of nature in physics. Both of these quite new perspectives strongly support the contention that man is after all made in the image of God. What we have come to realize is that there is no scientific reason why God cannot create an element of nature from other elements of nature by working within the chances and accidents which provide nature with her indeterminism and her freedom. We also see in a new way that the fact that man is indeed an integral part of nature in no way precludes his bearing the image of the designer of nature. Or to put it another way, there is nothing to prevent God from making in His image an entity which is at the same time an integral part of nature.¹⁰

Regardless of how persuasive or unpersuasive we may judge Pollard's argument to be, the belief that man is God's image supplies the only solid ground for that much-praised, much-prized value of Western civilization—man's inherent dignity. For what is it that imbues man with dignity? If he is nothing but garbage or a complex mechanism or an over-specialized animal, why ascribe to him a worth that is literally incalculable? Why follow the teaching of Jesus Christ and impute to human beings a dignity which is best articulated by the phrase, the sacredness of personality? That Jesus Christ does impute so high a dignity to human beings is indisputable in the light of the Gospel. Indeed, He imputes to human beings a dignity so high as to dichotomize nature. On the one side, Jesus Christ puts the whole of created reality; on the other, He puts man; and axiologically, or in terms of his worth, man outweighs nature. Thus in Matthew 6:28-30 our Lord as-

signs to man a worth above and beyond the whole botanical order. "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" But why is man, if merely one more emergent in the evolutionary process, valued above and beyond rarest roses or exotic orchids? Again, in Matthew 10:29-31 our Lord imputes to man a worth above and beyond the whole avian order. "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows." But why is man valued above and beyond parakeets and falcons?

Once more, in Matthew 12:12 our Lord imputes to man a worth above and beyond the whole zoological order as He exclaims, "How much more valuable is a person than a sheep!" Come to Denver for the National Western Stock Show held annually in January, and you will be astonished at the fabulous prices paid for champion steers, as much as \$52,000. Remember by contrast that an average person even in today's inflated economy is worth about one dollar chemically. Then why is man valued above and beyond blue-ribbon steers?

Furthermore, in Matthew 16:26 our Lord imputes to man a worth above and beyond the whole sweep of created reality. "What shall it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" Why does Jesus Christ value man above the entire planet and beyond all the cosmos? Why? Man is unique because he alone is God's image-bearer; and as such he possesses

inherent dignity and incalculable worth. As finite person reflecting the inexhaustible realities and mysteries of infinite Personhood, he cannot be valued too highly. Yet of what practical significance is this evaluation of man, grounded in his dignity as the image of God? Is not this belief just one more element in an outmoded theology? Let Leslie Newbigin answer.

During World War II, Hitler sent men to the famous Bethel Hospital to inform Pastor Bodelschwingh, its director, that the State could no longer afford to maintain hundreds of epileptics who were useless to society and only constituted a drain on scarce resources, and that orders were being issued to have them destroyed. Bodelschwingh confronted them in his room at the entrance to the Hospital and fought a spiritual battle which eventually sent them away without having done what they were sent to do. He had no other weapon for the battle than the simple affirmation that these were men and women made in the image of God and that to destroy them was to commit a sin against God which would surely be punished. What other argument could he have used?¹¹

Yes, and what other argument was needed? Abandon belief in man as God's image, and in the long run you abandon belief in human dignity.

Man as God's Prodigal

In the third place, the Bible asserts that man is *God's prodigal*. Plants, birds, animals are instinctually programmed. They move in a predictable course from birth to death. But man is that peculiar creature who, possessing intelligence and freedom, may choose to behave in ways that are self-frustrating and self-destructive. The Spanish philosopher, Ortega Y. Gasset, remarks that, "While the tiger cannot cease being a tiger,

cannot be detigered, man lives in a perpetual risk of being dehumanized."¹² Why, though, is man always in danger of failing to become what he potentially could be? Why does he, as a matter of fact, live in a state of ambivalence and contradiction, the animal whose nature it is to act contrary to his nature? Back in 1962 Dr. Paul MacLean suggested, some of you may recall, the theory of schizophychology, speculating that man is radically self-divided because he has inherited three brains which are now required to function in unity. The oldest of these is reptilian; the second is derived from the lower animals; the third and most recent is the source of man's higher mental characteristics. Hence the brain of *Homo sapiens* is the scene of unceasing tension. Why wonder, therefore, if unlike other animals he is erratically unpredictable?

Arthur Koestler, too, has indulged in speculation as to why man finds himself in a constant state of self-contradiction. In his 1968 book, *The Ghost in the Machine*, he advances a novel theory.

When one contemplates the streak of insanity running through human history, it appears highly probable that *homo sapiens* is a biological freak. . . the result of some remarkable mistake in the evolutionary process. . . Somewhere along the line of his ascent, something has gone wrong.¹³

I will not stop to consider Koestler's suggestion that with the help of psychopharmacology the evolutionary mistake which is man may hopefully be corrected. I simply inquire as to what has gone wrong. Koestler has his own conjecture, but I prefer to accept the explanation advanced in Scripture. Man, instead of living in a self-fulfilling fellowship with God, a fellowship of trust and obedience and love, misused his freedom. He did as the younger brother did in our Lord's parable of

the prodigal son: he turned away from his Father in the name of freedom. Man chose in an aboriginal catastrophe to transgress the laws and limits established by his Creator. He became a rebel. Thus God cries out in Isaiah 1:2, "I have brought up children and they have rebelled against me," a lament which echoes beyond the Jewish nation and reverberates over the whole human family. A planetary prodigal, man is thus in self-willed alienation from God, an exile wandering East of Eden, squandering his patrimony (think of our problems of pollution and starvation), living in misery and frustration, unable to be what he ought to be and to do what he ought to do, self-divided and self-destructive. The Biblical view of man as God's image who is now God's prodigal, a rebel and a sinner, impresses many of our contemporaries as incredibly mythological. Yet it impresses some of us as more congruent with the realities of history, psychology, and sociology, than any of its secular rivals.

Man as God's Problem

In the fourth place, the Bible, which we believe gives us God's perspective on man, asserts that man, God's creature, God's image, God's prodigal, has become God's problem through the aboriginal catastrophe of

self-chosen alienation. Joseph Wood Krutch, a noted student of literature who retired to Arizona and there devoted himself to the study of nature, sat one day on a mountain pondering a wild idea. What if in the creative process God has stopped after the fifth day? What if there had been no sixth day which saw the advent of man? Would that have been a wiser course for infinite wisdom to follow? After all, we read in Genesis 6:5, 6 that God indulged in some sober second thoughts about man, His own image turned into a prodigal. "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart." One might interpret the judgment of the flood as a sort of huge eraser which God used to rub out His mistake! Moreover, the Bible does not hesitate to say that man, God's image and God's prodigal, has become God's heartache. Yes, unhesitatingly, the Bible describes the divine reaction to human sin as a reaction of intensest grief. So in the prophecy of Hosea 11 we come across a text which, granting that the language is anthropopathic or attributing human emotions to God, portrays a heartbroken Creator:

When Israel was a child I loved him as a son and brought him out of Egypt. But the more I called to him, the more he rebelled, sacrificing to Baal and burning incense to idols. I trained him from infancy, I taught him to walk, I held him in my arms. But he doesn't know or even care that it was I who raised him. As a man would lead his favorite ox, so I led Israel with my ropes of love. I loosened his muzzle so he could eat. I myself have stopped and fed him. . . . Oh, how can I give you up, my Ephraim? How can I let you go? How can I forsake you like Adam and Zeboiim? My heart cries out within me; how I long to help you!

Listening to that pathetic outpouring over the people of Israel and by extension over people everywhere, we turn back in memory to the day in the first century when God incarnate looked upon the city of Jerusalem and wept.

God's creature and God's image, self-constituted as God's prodigal, man is not only God's heartache but also God's problem. What can the Creator do with the creature who has rebelliously prostituted his God-bestowed capacities? Should God admit failure? Should God destroy man as a tragic blunder? Should He send this sinful creature into eternal exile? God, if I may be allowed an anthropomorphism no more crude than those the Bible uses, has a God-sized problem on His hands. In His holiness He cannot wink at sin, pretending it does not matter. He cannot lightly pardon man's guilty disobedience. No, His justice requires that the sinner be punished; and yet to send man into eternal exile would mean the frustration of God's very purpose in creating this creature. For as best we can infer from the Bible, God Who is love was motivated by love to expand the orbit of beatitude by sharing His own joyful experience of love with finite persons who could respond to His love with their love. So what can God do? Blot out His blunder and stand forever baffled in the fulfillment of His desire by the will of a mere creature? God's dilemma is brought to a sharp focus in Romans 3:25, where the apostle Paul writes that God must be just while at the same time somehow justifying the sinner. God must remain loyal to the demands of His holiness and justice, yet forgive man, cleanse him, transform him, and only then welcome him into the eternal fellowship of holy love. This is certainly a God-sized problem, a dilemma which might seem to baffle even the resources of Deity.

But the Gospel is Good News precisely because of the amazing strategy by which God resolves His own

God-sized dilemma. And that strategy is the amazing strategy of the Cross. Incarnate in Jesus Christ, a Man at once truly divine and truly human, God dies on the cross bearing the full burden of the punishment human sin deserves. But in His Easter victory He breaks the power of the grave. And now He offers forgiveness, cleansing, transformation, and eternal fellowship with Himself to any man, who magnetized by Calvary love, will respond to the Gospel in repentance and faith. This, most hastily sketched, is God's solution to the problem of man. What a costly solution! Its cost, not even a sextillion of computers could ever compute!

I am one of those rather weakminded people who find chess too exhausting for their feeble brains. But I admire those intelligences of higher order who can play that intricate game with ease and pleasure. Paul Morphy, in his day a world champion chessman, stopped at an art gallery in England to inspect a painting of which he had often heard, "Checkmate!" The title explained the picture. On one side of the chessboard sat a leering devil; opposite him was a young man in despair. For the artist had so arranged the pieces that the young man's king was trapped. "Checkmate!" Intrigued and challenged, Morphy carefully studied the location of the pieces. Finally he exclaimed, "Bring me a chess board. I can still save him." He had hit on one adroit move which changed the situation and rescued the young man from his predicament. That is what God has done for all of us in Jesus Christ. By the mind-stunning maneuver of the Christ-event He has provided salvation from the consequences of our sin. He has opened up the way for His prodigals in their self-imposed exile to return home, forgiven, restored, welcomed unconditionally into the Father's loving fellowship.

Man's Possibility

Having discussed man's origin, and nature--man as

God's creature, image, prodigal, and problem--may I merely mention man's possibility as Biblically disclosed? For Scripture asserts that by repentance and faith man may enter into a new relationship with God, becoming *God's child, God's friend, God's colaborer*, and so being *God's glory* in this world and the world beyond time and space.

Instead of existing as Eiseley's cosmic orphan, man can enter into a filial relationship of obedient love with the Heavenly Father. Instead of existing in hostile estrangement from God, man can enter into a relationship with his Creator which is akin to the intimacy of mature friendship on its highest plane. Instead of existing in frustration, feeling that all his labor is a futile business of drawing water in a sieve, man can enter into a relationship of cooperative creativity with God; he can find fulfillment as he develops the potentials of our planet and eventually perhaps those of outer space. He can find fulfillment, too, functioning in his society as salt and light and yeast. He can also find fulfillment as he follows the law of neighbor love, sharing what-

ever good he may have, and sharing especially the Good News that God in love longs for the human family to be coextensive with His divine family. Instead of anticipating blank nonentity after he has died, man can enter into a relationship with God which will last through death and on through eternity as a conscious union of finite persons with infinite Person.

What a magnificent model of man this is! What a gulf stretches between it and those models of man proposed by reductive naturalism! So I close by voicing my agreement with that perceptive Jewish scholar, Abraham Heschel,

It is an accepted fact that the Bible has given the world a new concept of God. What is not realized is the fact that the Bible has given the world a new vision of man. The Bible is not a book about God; it is a book about man.

From the perspective of the Bible:

Who is man? A being in travail with God's dreams and designs, with God's dream of a world redeemed, of reconciliation of heaven and earth, of a mankind which is truly His image, reflecting His wisdom, justice and compassion. God's dream is not to be alone, to have mankind as a partner in the drama of continuous creation.¹⁴

I agree with that enthusiastically--except that in my opinion the Gospel of Jesus Christ adds to Heschel's statement heights and depths which Old Testament anthropology only intimates.

In all of our work, then, whether in science or any other vocation, may we strive to see man from God's perspective, remembering that God's model of authentic personhood is Jesus Christ. May our anthropology be more than a theoretical conviction. May it serve as a dynamic which shapes our own lives.

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- 6 Robert E. Fitch, "Secular Images of Man in Contemporary Literature," *Religious Education*, LIII, p. 87.
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- 11 Quoted in Cohn Chapman, *Christianity on Trial* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, 1975), p. 226.
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- 13 Quoted in Denis Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
- 14 Abraham J. Heschel, *Who Is Man?* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1973), p. 119.

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