

VIII

THE NATURE OF MAN

SOUL AND BODY

HAVING reached this point, the Catholic reader is usually anxious to get on to the story of the Fall of Man. He feels that the Fall is the really interesting thing, creation being only a necessary preliminary. There could be no Fall till creation provided the man and the woman; but once the man and the woman have arrived, there's no need to linger; he wants to get on with the story; what, he feels, are we waiting for?

But we, who are studying theology, cannot go racing on like that. If we do, we shall simply not understand the Fall, or indeed anything else that has happened to man. We must linger on creation to see two things principally. The first is what the being was who fell—that is, we must look more closely at the nature of man. The second is what he fell from and why it mattered—that is, we must study God's plan for the race He had created. Only then can we go on to see what man made of God's plan. It will be many pages yet before we come to the Fall.

Come back to the two elements in the creation of man. "The Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth"; that accounts for his body. And "He breathed into his face the breath of life." That may occupy us rather longer.

"Breath", remember, is the name of the third Person of the Trinity, for the root meaning of the word "spirit" is

“breath”. Put this together with another phrase from Genesis: “Let us make man to our image and likeness.” What God breathed into man was His own image and likeness—a spiritual soul. It is by our soul—partless, spaceless, immortal, capable of knowledge and love—that we resemble God. It is an improbable combination—the slime of the earth, and the spirit that is in the likeness of God.

We are so used to the combination, for every one of us is a specimen of it, that we may not remark how extraordinary it is. The Church frowns on mixed marriages, but every one of us is the result of the most mixed of all marriages, the wedding of spirit and matter. In this we are unique; no other being is compound of spirit and matter as we are: angels are spirit, with no matter to complicate it; cats are matter, with no spirit to complicate it.

But what does the union of these two improbable partners *mean*? There is need for a volume here, or perhaps a library. We must be content with a quick look. Every living body—plant, animal, man—has a principle of life, that is, it has a constituent which accounts for its being alive. This is its soul. We are aware of its presence in the activities of the being while it is alive; we are even more aware of its absence, in the corruption which follows death.

The souls, the life-principles, of plants and animals produce no vital activities which rise above matter: they are marvellous enough, they animate the body; in plants they make possible movement and growth and reproduction, in animals some faint likeness of knowledge, some faint beginning of social life, as well.

But the soul of man not only animates the body, it has powers of its own, powers utterly outside the possibilities of matter. Here it would be well to glance back once more at the section called “Spirit”. The union of spirit and matter means that the human soul, by which our bodies are living

bodies and function as living bodies, is what no other soul is, a spirit.

The union is such that the soul is in every part of the body: and this again needs a closer look. The soul, being a spirit, is not in space at all. How can it be in every part of a body which is so very definitely spread out in space? Do not try to form a picture of a soul exactly the same shape as the body but made of thinner stuff (transparent, perhaps); or of the body thinly buttered with soul, so that every bit of body has a bit of soul. The soul is not in space at all; it animates the body by superiority of energy. A spirit is where it acts; the soul is in every part of the body because no part of the body escapes its life-giving action.

There, then, stands man. His soul, because it *is* a soul, animates his body, as the soul of a lower animal animates its; but because man's soul is a spirit, it has the faculties of intellect and will by which it knows and loves as the animal's cannot. To man's intellect, objects are present not only as those individual objects seen, but as *what they are*; it can abstract their essence, analyse, generalize, reflect, build up all the great structures of thought, come to the knowledge of spirit and of the infinite Spirit, grow in the domination of the material universe. We are proud of our dog when he brings in the morning paper; pleased with a chimpanzee which has been trained to smoke or drink from a cup; but animal knowledge is only a faint parody of human knowledge. And so, with all its pathos, is animal love.

This superiority of the spiritual soul spreads downward—to the border region between soul and body, to imagination and sense memory and the emotions, in none of which has the animal more than hints and suggestions of the human. It spreads to the body itself.

We have not space here to develop the final point in the relation of soul and body as the philosopher would; but at

least remember that they are not two separate things, one of which animates the other; they are combined in one being, man himself. By its substantial union with a spiritual soul, man's body is—shall we say spiritualized?—not mere matter anyway, but ennobled. If, by some impossible chance, one of the lower animals were given a human body, he would not know what to do with it.

But even when we have seen man as a union of spirit and matter, we have not seen him whole and entire. Two other truths about him must be seen, or we see him wrong.

The first is that man is essentially a social being. We should not come into existence unless other humans produced us, or stay in existence unless they maintained us in it. This dependence on others we do not outgrow. We have all sorts of needs which we cannot supply for ourselves; and all sorts of powers—to love, for example, to teach, to procreate—which can never be used save in relation to others. Without his fellow-man, no one would ever reach maturity; he would be a rough sketch for a man, no more.

GOD'S LAW AND FREEDOM

The second is the truth we have already seen as applying to all beings whatever. Man is made by God of nothing, is held in existence from moment to moment simply by God's will to hold him there. God's will is the reason for man's existence; so God's will must be the law of his existence. To disobey the law is sin; to think we can gain by disobeying it is insanity.

That there are laws in the universe, no one doubts: the law of gravity is one obvious example: the laws of dietetics are another. By learning these laws and living according to them we gain freedom. Pause upon this, if the thought is new to you. Freedom is always bound up with obedience to the law

of God; there is no such thing for man as freedom from these laws, there is only freedom within them. Each new law learned by us increases our freedom. We learn the laws of gravity, air-currents, movement of bodies; and at last we can fly in the upper air. We learn what elements are necessary in our diet, and certain diseases vanish.

That there are laws applying to man's soul, moral laws, is just as true. The same God who made the law of gravity, made the laws of justice and purity. Physical laws do not affect only those who accept them—the new-born baby can die for want of the right vitamins or be killed by falling from a height. It is the same with the laws of morality. Because both sorts are laws, we cannot break them. How could we break the law of gravity? We could jump off a cliff, but by doing that we should not break the law of gravity, we should illustrate it.

We cannot break the laws, but, if we ignore them, they can break us. In this the laws of morality are the same as physical laws. If we disobey them, even in ignorance, our nature is always damaged, for they are the laws of reality. If we disobey them, knowing that God has commanded us to obey them, then there is sin, the worst damage of all.

The moral laws being of such importance to man, how does he know what they are? In two ways principally—by the witness of his nature, and by the teaching of men entitled to speak in the name of God.

Take nature first. God, making creatures, built the laws of their being into them. The maker of a car does much the same: he builds his machine to run with water in the radiator, with petrol in the tank, with a proper order in the gears; that way it will function. God makes our bodies, with lungs that need air and with a complex mechanism to ensure that they get it, with a need for certain kinds of food, and so on. By powers, and by felt needs that will cause us to exercise the

powers, God builds His laws into our body; in obedience to them, the body is in health.

In the same way, God builds His laws into our souls, too. The laws of justice and purity and worship are as real for the soul as the laws of diet for the body. In obedience to them, the soul is in health.

If we disobey the laws for the running of the car, the engine makes strange noises and at last comes to a stop. If we disobey the laws of the body, we have pain, and ultimately death. The stirring of conscience in the soul is like the strange noises in the engine and the pain in the body; it is a protest against misuse. It is the soul's way of indicating that the laws according to which its Maker built it are being ignored, that it is not being run as its Maker built it to be run.

This pain in the soul is unlike any other—it is an intense awareness that we *ought not* to be acting as we are, that a particular action is not merely damaging us but is wrong. Even if the action is apparently pleasurable and profitable—as when one takes another man's money or wife—there is this inner protest to spoil the pleasure and make the profit questionable.

This inner protest is not by itself a sufficient guide; we are no longer as God made us; the generations have introduced distortions at this point or that, habits and ideas have taken root and grown into a second nature, silencing nature's first utterance. For any given man or society, the inner witness sounds surely on most matters; but there are those on which it does not sound. For certainty, we need the statement of God's appointed teachers.

Conscience is the practical moral judgement of the intellect, the intellect's judgement upon the rightness and wrongness of our own actions. The intellect makes its judgement according to God's law known to it in one or other of the two ways we have been discussing.

As only God can tell us with certainty the laws by which we should live, so only God can tell us with certainty the purpose of our life. We cannot use anything intelligently until we know what it is for. Men apply the rules as a matter of course to everything—to everything, that is, except one thing: themselves. Yet it is no less clear about man himself than about all other things. We cannot intelligently handle our own lives, or influence the lives of others, unless we know what man is for.

There is no space to develop this idea here, but please reflect on it. Unless we know the goal man is meant to reach, we cannot direct our own life towards it or help others to reach it. To walk the road of life not knowing where it leads to is mere blindness.

Our Maker has told us what He made us for—to come to the fullest development of our own powers in total union with Him.

Let us take a first look at this. Man's highest powers are intellect, by which he knows, and will, by which he loves (and, according to his love, chooses). The object of the intellect is truth, of the will, goodness. Our intellect is to come to the fullest knowledge of the supreme truth—which is God. Our will is to come to the fullest love of the supreme goodness—which is God.

In knowing and loving God we shall achieve the purpose for which God made us. So much we might have guessed without any revelation from God. What we never could have suspected, without His telling, is what the knowing and loving are to be.