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On Being Human
The Philosophical Anthropology of
Martin Buber & Rav Soloveitchik
Session Two

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April 21, 2013



THIS COURSE IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF:

אסתר חנה ז'ל בת צבי ופרומה עלקא פייגא בת מאיר ופשא לאה ז'ל נח בן אברהם ופייגא ז'ל
MAY THEIR SOULS BE BOUND IN THE EVERLASTING BOND OF LIFE תהא נשמתם צרוות בצרור החיים

Institute for Jewish Continuity
 “On Being Human”
 Spring 2013
 Session Two: Human Beings and the Non-human World

I. Rav Soloveitchik

A. The Primordial Condition

1. Man like animal was created originally to live solely upon vegetables and fruit. Let us be clear that this rule was not given to man and an ethical norm but as a natural tendency (*Emergence of Ethical Man*, 32):

And G-d said, “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of the earth... to you it shall be for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, wherein there is life, I have given green herb for food” (Gen. 1:29-30)

2. Primordial man neither desired nor was tempted by any food other than of the vegetative realm. Thus, the verse (Gen. 1:30) concluded “and it was so”: the ethical norm became a behavior pattern, and expression of the ontic order. Man and animal were not driven toward killing or devouring other living creatures (*EEM*, 32)

B. Corruption (*hamas*) and Lusting (*ta'avah*)

1. What was the nature of this “corruption”? All creatures had overreached themselves... creatures acquired new drives and began to display new demands that exceeded the limits set by divine will and aboriginal, undisturbed nature. They began to stretch their hand out to something that did not belong to them... [this is] *hamas*. *Gezalah* is a specific case of *hamas*...one of these acts was the reaching out of man and animal after the lives of other creatures inferior to them in physical strength (*EEM*, 32-33)

2. A new relationship is established between man and animal [after the flood], tension engendered by fear and dread (*EEM*, 34)

3. *And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting; and the children of Israel also wept on their part, and said: 'Would that we were given flesh to eat! (Num. 11:4)*

4. *And say thou unto the people: Sanctify yourselves against to-morrow, and ye shall eat flesh; for ye have wept in the ears of the L-RD, saying: Would that we were given flesh to eat! for it was well with us in Egypt; therefore the L-RD will give you flesh, and ye shall eat. Ye shall not eat one day, nor two days, nor five days, neither ten days, nor twenty days; but a whole month, until it come out at your nostrils, and it be loathsome*

unto you; because that ye have rejected the L-RD who is among you, and have troubled Him with weeping, saying: Why, now, came we forth out of Egypt?'

C. Korbanot—Compromise and Limitation

1. *What man soever there be of the house of Israel, that killeth an ox, or lamb, or goat, in the camp, or that killeth it without the camp, and hath not brought it unto the door of the tent of meeting, to present it as an offering unto the L-RD before the tabernacle of the L-RD, blood shall be imputed unto that man; he hath shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people (Lev. 17:3-4)*

2. *Only be stedfast in not eating the blood; for the blood is the life; and thou shalt not eat the life with the flesh. Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it out upon the earth as water (Deut. 12:23-24)*

And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among them, that eateth any manner of blood, I will set My face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life (Lev. 17:10-11)

D. G-d's Dominion

G-d is not only the absolute, autonomous creator of the cosmos, but also the onlooker, before whom the whole cosmic drama unfolds and who responds and reacts to change... He listens not only to the music of the spheres and hymn-singing of heaven and earth... but to the wailing of the oppressed and persecuted, to the hollow and pained voices of injustice and violence (*EEM*, 41)

E. Humans and Their Environment: Dynamism and Confinement in the Divine and the Human

1. G-d is identified with ceaseless movement, whether in the sense of continuous activity, like creation of, or eternal vigilance over, the universe... (*EEM*, 49)

2. Even divinity is “confined” to a specific locus. We cannot help but notice the intent of the Torah to “arrest” divinity within concrete bounds. The Sinaitic revelation demonstrated the inapproachability of G-d... Immediately thereafter, G-d commands Moses, “And let them make me a Sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex. 25:8). G-d imposes voluntary imprisonment on Himself, by His own free will arrests Himself within a hallowed abode in particular (*EEM*, 50-51)

3. Human life is not only movement; it is also imprisonment within and integration with a stable frame of reference. A man is not allowed to tear away from his natural moorings; in this respect, he is more like plant than animal. He takes root he is stationary and forms one entity with his environment... that environment is the soil: both [human and plant] belong to Mother Earth, and both are part of her (*EEM*, 52)

4. On the one hand he beholds G-d in every nook and corner of creation...as if G-d were at hand close to and beside him in a friendly dialogue. And yet the very moment man turns his face to G-d he finds him remote, unapproachable, enveloped in transcendence and mystery (*Lonely Man of Faith*, 48)

F. Human Beings and Earth: Co-bearers of Sin and Redemption

1. *And unto Adam He said: 'Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying: Thou shalt not eat of it; cursed is the ground for thy sake; in toil shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.'* (Gen. 3: 17-19)

2. *Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination. And thou shalt not lie with any beast to defile thyself therewith; neither shall any woman stand before a beast, to lie down thereto; it is perversion. Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things; for in all these the nations are defiled, which I cast out from before you. And the land was defiled, therefore I did visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land vomited out her inhabitants.* (Lev. 18:22-25)

G. Conclusions

1. Metaphysical confluence of human beings and nature

2. Co-responsibility

3. Humans as concrete and confined

...Man-plant is incapable of meeting his destiny as an uprooted, abstract spiritual being, not having any bonds with primordial Mother Earth. G-d, confined (as it were) within the cosmos, wants man to be confined (*EEM*, 62)

4. Natural world is not static

Man, in his confinement, and G-d, in his voluntary exile, meet at certain crossroads. G-d chances upon and surprises man. By virtue of this sudden encounter, man takes root in this mystical place. Jacob met G-d in Beit El, and a new bond between him and that placed formed (*EEM*, 61)

II. Martin Buber (from *I and Thou*, Kaufmann translation)

A. Primordial Condition: Connectedness

There is no I as such but only the I of the basic word I-You and the I of the basic word I-It (54)

B. Two Modes of Existence: I-it and I-Thou

1. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being (54)
2. ...it is not experiences alone that bring the world to man. For what they bring to him is only a world that consists of It and It and It, of He and He and She and She and It (55)
3. Whoever says You does not have something for his object. ...where you is said there is no something. You has no borders (55).

C. The Struggle for Authenticity

However the history of the individual and that of the human race may diverge in other respects, they agree in this at least: both signify a progressive increase of the It-world (87)

...[I]n sick ages it happens that the It-world, no longer irrigated and fertilized by the living currents of the You-world, severed and stagnant, becomes a gigantic swamp phantom and overpowers man. As he accommodates himself to a world of objects that no achieve any presence for him, he succumbs to it (102).

D. Realizing the Human

1. True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other...but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living reciprocal relationship to one another (94).
2. Man encounters being and becoming as what confronts him... What there is reveals itself to him in the occurrence... Measure and comparison have fled. The encounters do not order themselves to become a world, but each is for you a sign of the world order... The world that appears to you in this way is unreliable, for it appears always new to you, and you cannot take it by its word... It cannot be surveyed; if you try to make it surveyable, you lose it... You cannot come to an understanding about it with others; you are lonely with it; but it teaches you to encounter others and to stand your ground in such encounters... (83-84).