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For the better part of the last century, human nature was widely considered to be a misleading idea. Humans, it was said, do not come into the world equipped with anything more than their biological substratum. Their most interesting qualities—their characteristically *human* qualities—derive instead from culture, from the effects of nurture. There is no such thing as human nature, I heard a distinguished sociologist say recently. People are malleable; culture is the milieu in which they are formed.

There are many reasons why twentieth-century thinkers came to this conclusion. The idea of the human being as a *blank slate*, a term going back to John Locke (1632–1704), appealed to the modern sense of possibility. If no fixed essence governed the course of our lives, then we were free to create ourselves in our own chosen image. If categories like race, sex, and class lacked any deep, abiding significance, then we could make of them whatever we wished. If neither nature, nor God, nor the past bound us to a predestined template, then we could become citizens of the future, captains of our own fate. The more lightly human nature weighed on

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us, the greater the scope that could be given to imagination and hope.

Moreover, as modern history has vividly shown, attitudes and ideologies that sought to fix human nature entrenched an often-unjust status quo. Supposed natural and innate characteristics of women were used as reasons to keep them in assigned, restrictive social roles, economically and politically marginal vis-à-vis their male peers. Allegedly inferior races—a trope going back to the Greeks—were thought of as made for slavery or colonization; higher races bore a supposed white man's burden. Exclusionary immigration policies prevented Chinese, and then southern and eastern Europeans, from coming to the United States. They were purportedly unfit (by nature and subsequently culture) to become equal citizens in our democracy. One could add indefinitely to the parade of horrible conceptions. Most horrifically, for the Nazis, Jews were not only inferior; they were subhuman, a kind of "life unworthy of life." Their destruction was required to ensure the health of the alleged Aryan race, the supposed acme of human nature.

In the face of such prejudice (to use a seriously inadequate word), one can sympathize with the impulse either to banish talk of human nature altogether or think of it not as something discovered but rather as something wholly constructed by ourselves—and hence susceptible to endless amelioration, emancipation, and transformation. Unlike other animals, humans could remake their world and themselves; they could become as creator gods.

And yet human nature is back. Owing to developments in the biological sciences, evolutionary psychology, linguistics, and cognitive neuroscience, and the impress of these disciplines on intellectuals, philosophers, and popular culture, the subject has returned. A century and a half after the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, biology has fully returned humanity to nature. Our traits, we are told, have evolved to help our species succeed and reproduce within our natural environment. At least in this respect, we are no different from all other animals. For so-called sociobiologists, humans are city builders for reasons not dissimilar to why bees are hive builders: these adaptations best promote our survival. Just as Sir Isaac Newton eliminated the ancient difference between the heavens and earth, showing that the same forces governed events in both realms, evolution is no respecter of the presumed distinctiveness of the human species. Darwinism, if we take its logic to its fullest, can be a great leveler, a "universal acid" as the philosopher Daniel Dennett calls it, in which the exalted image we have had of ourselves dissolves. (But must it? That is a question we will explore below.)

Evolution is hardly the only leveler. Much of the recent conversation about human nature has been driven by advances in genetics, dramatically symbolized by the mapping of the human genome in 2003. Genetics has shown an overlap of 98 percent of the human genome with that of the chimpanzee, our closest primate relative.¹ Exactly what significance we should find in this fact depends to a large extent on what we take the role of genes to be in shaping evolved human traits. It

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is not controversial to think that a complex neurobiological system like the eye is constructed from a genetic blueprint. It is contentious, or at least unsettling, to think of our moods, faculties, abilities, and intelligence as having a genetic basis. It is disquieting to think that some persons may be more prone to violence and less capable of controlling themselves than others—and this because of their genes (in concert with their early childhood experiences).² Do some criminals have a genetic predisposition to criminality? Many of us are disturbed by what such a view of human nature does to our moral assumptions and legal practices. But unsettling or not, behavioral genetics will continue to push into these areas, giving us grounds to think that much of what we find distinctive about ourselves is written into our alleles, so to speak.

Another source of disquiet comes from neuroscience. The idea of the soul departed from scientific discourse long ago. One sees the shift in Locke. Yet the concept of the mind took its place. The cognitive sciences have little regard for the mind, though, at least insofar as it is supposed to have some status distinct from the body and more precisely the brain. Neuroscience seems to have banged the last nail into the coffin of philosophical dualism: the hoary dichotomy between mind and body. For many neuroscientists and their philosophical allies, all that we can plausibly mean by the term *mind* arises out of the neuronal activity of the brain, which for all its extraordinary complexity is, at bottom, a three-pound bit of physical stuff. The “computational architecture” of the mind relies on the brain’s “hardwired” capacities for memory, learning, language acquisition, and decision making. The very phe-

nomenon of consciousness is thought by many neuroscientists to be simply an artifact of the brain's biochemistry. Stomachs digest, and brains think; that's what they are adapted to do. Increasingly, "brain" replaces "myself" or "I" in casual speech. An eminent biologist, when recently asked whether she believes in God, said, "Part of my brain does."³ Is "self" destined to dissolve into "brain"? Will we be able to sustain our sense of ourselves as unique, irreducible *persons* in the brave new world of neuroscience?

The return of human nature as a credible concept is both promising and troubling. Evolutionary biology, behavioral genetics, and cognitive neuroscience lend support to the thesis of an underlying as well as universal human nature. In the words of the evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker, the human brain, together with its abilities and the behaviors that flow from them, evinces "an astonishingly detailed set of aptitudes and tastes *that all cultures have in common* . . . [a] shared way of thinking, feeling, and living [that] makes us look like a single tribe."⁴ It's not just the universal human fear of snakes—a useful trait to have evolved in Africa hundreds of thousands of years ago—but the production of poetry and food taboos, the exchange of goods, mourning the dead, grammar, the division of labor, age grading, families, and the use of tools—all of which are universal too.⁵ They stem from a basal human nature that we now see more clearly with scientifically enlightened eyes. This is promising because we are both getting closer to the truth and have firm (or at least scientifically plausible) grounds to sponsor our moral belief in the fundamental equality of human beings.

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But it is troubling as well since it is not clear where this line of thinking leads with respect to the unique worth of our species. Some have already begun to speak of “unsanctifying human life.”⁶ If we ought now to speak of a human nature rooted in a human biology that is simply continuous with the biology of all other living things, what, if anything, is special about us? Is our sense that we are special, that we have *dignity*, simply an artifact of perspective? Is it no more than a species-wide gesture of self-aggrandizement (now fashionably called *speciesism*)? Perhaps it is a luxury that the planet cannot afford? Some have started to talk about our geologic era as the *Anthropocene*, the epoch where human action has begun to change the very ecosystems of the planet in potentially catastrophic ways. To be the most successful species imposes heavy costs. Unlike the onetime rulers of the earth, the dinosaurs, who likely perished in the climate change brought on by volcanic eruptions and asteroid impact, we might have the distinction of wiping out ourselves.

Human Nature and Human Persons

How then will we take our sense that we are both a part of nature and apart from it? How are human nature and nature as such related? How are both related to person, the term that springs readily to mind when we articulate what we think we are? Science, as it develops accounts of human nature, embeds human beings, apparently without remainder, in the natural world. As such, it gives us a new way of being at home in the

universe. But that way also makes us unsettled. If we are in the end nothing more than “systems of particles,” as philosopher Wilfrid Sellars put it, can we still understand ourselves as persons? (And if not, should we not prefer homelessness to our new, robustly scientific way of being at home?)

In truth, we have been unsettled for a long time; the biblical materials assayed in this book attest to that. We have long suspected that we don't fit in—a sentiment that Rilke ascribes to our animal observers in the epigraph to this book. For earlier ages, humans, animals though they were, stood apart because they were endowed with immortal, substantial souls. Although they differed from one another, the accounts of Plato, Aristotle, Maimonides (d. 1204), Saint Thomas Aquinas, and René Descartes all linked human nature to our having a soul within us. Soul talk made good sense, given the science of the day. Yet it is much harder to see how soul talk can find a place in our science, at least as it is presently constituted.⁷ Rather than talk about the soul, we might better capture our sense of distinction from nature by pointing to the gap between a third- and first-person point of view. Science allows us to see ourselves as complex natural, physical objects; it speaks about human beings in the third person, momentarily but systematically suspending our familiar sense of ourselves. We are complex living things in a world of both other living and nonliving things. The emphasis is on things. Our native way of speaking, however, assumes a first-person stance; we take what we feel ourselves to be—subjects, selves, persons—as existential bedrock. We are not things; we are per-

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sons. Or more precisely, we are things who are also persons. We are beings for whom the third- *and* first-person frames of reference are ineluctable.

Human nature puts this polarity directly before us. When we speak about our human nature, we frame ourselves within a world of forces, processes, mechanisms, and functions—a world of things and causes. When we speak of personhood, we locate ourselves within a world of purposes, intentions, and norms—a space of reasons. Even in conventional speech, talk of human nature points to an underlying causal dimension, where nature impinges on and at least partially determines us. Reference to human nature typically invokes appeals to constraints or excuses. (“What do you expect? I’m only human”; “I’m a pack rat, extrovert, [fill in the blank] by nature.”) By contrast, personhood allows a more expansive, open-ended sense of ourselves. Human nature implies limits; talk of persons implies stature. Both are true to our reality.⁸ Unless we are stricken by an attack of philosophical conscience, we probably don’t worry too much about the different valences of these terms. But if we do notice their polar tendencies, as the new discourse of human nature leads us to do, how should we integrate them? *To talk about human nature, I want to suggest, is a way of speaking about ourselves that gives emphasis to our shared, biological origins, features, and history.* It is to speak in a way that attends to and credits the underlying biological conditions out of which our conscious sense of self has emerged. In a scientific age, we can do no less. We nevertheless must keep in mind that science is one of *our* ways of speaking. It is refined, abstract, and impersonal, but it

is still a human form of speech. (What else could it be?) We want to follow science down to get to the deepest truth about ourselves—but we want to do so *as* selves, *as* persons who have an interest in truth. Thus, our scientific project—in this case, the project of ascertaining the truth about human nature—is launched from the perspective of persons who are able to suspend their first-person, familiar perspective, to aspire to a “view from nowhere,” in Thomas Nagel’s memorable phrase, only to return to a first-person stance enlightened and enriched.

We need to incorporate what science tells us about the complex creatures we are into our older categories. Some of that, as I have suggested, comes rather easily. To have a human nature is to share patterns, traits, capacities, and abilities with other human beings—those “human universals” that anthropologist Donald Brown has cataloged. It is to appreciate one’s uniqueness against an underlying background of broad similarity. The claim that there is a human nature entails that human beings, notwithstanding the particularities of cultures and their differentiation in the course of time, share so much with one another that their differences are translatable. We can understand, perhaps at best imperfectly, what we human beings in all times and places have made of our humanity; nothing human is alien to us, for the same deep structures, processes, and polarities inform us all.

But some of what we discover is harder to incorporate. Neuroscience seems to argue against the persistence and stability of human selfhood; the self is a story that our brains tell, as they try to find patterns among inputs. A belief in our (relative) freedom of choice and action seems undermined by neu-

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roscientific studies of mental causation; action seems to be initiated before the brain becomes conscious of it, making the (illusion of) choice an afterthought. It is not at all clear how these features of human nature can be made compatible with our familiar (and essential) sense of personhood.

Against the background of nature per se, how can human nature and our self-understanding as unique, valuable, conscious, morally agentic persons hold together? In my view, while we should look to science to tell us about the history and development of our species, our emergent biological structures and functions, we nonetheless must believe that science cannot be the whole story. The felt gap between scientific explanations, which speak in the language of the third person, the language of things, and the first-person perspective of lived experience, is not just unfortunate or untidy; *it is deeply significant*. It is a clue to what we really are. We are beings who cannot only see ourselves as objects; we must continue, if we are sane, to see ourselves as subjects unable to be eliminated. Unlike a machine, to use Immanuel Kant's language, which has "motive power," a human being has "formative power."⁹ A subject, a person, is a center of creative agency, a source of unique action and value. Hence, talk of human nature rooted in the ground of nature as such will always brush a bit against our grain. There will always be a "yes, but. . . ." We need to speak this way, but we must speak in more than this way. There is a gap between biology and personhood. Yet there is also dependence. What is it like to be human? It is to stand in the gap between nature and culture, biology and individuality; it is to hold on to both poles simultaneously.

These matters, considered from a Jewish point of view, lie at the heart of this book. My goal is a critical conversation between new insights into human nature and old, millennia-old Jewish teachings about human beings. My aim is emphatically not to argue against science but instead to push back against what I see as its abuse. The principal abuse is the diminution of human dignity, which some believe must follow from the full return of humanity to nature. I want to argue for the exceptionality of the human, for the worth, beyond price, as Kant puts it, of human beings. I will do so by trying to show where contemporary thinkers, who draw the nerve of their assertions from the new sciences of human nature, go wrong.

They go wrong primarily, I believe, in their reduction of human personhood to allegedly more basic realities. But as I have suggested, personhood *is* basic; it can't be explained by anything more primal without missing the target. Personhood *emerged* from a natural, biological substratum, from the elements of our human nature. But once it comes on the cosmic scene, it is ineluctable. Any attempt to analyze personhood presupposes its reality. It is, after all, we who are doing the analyzing. If we grant the emergent reality of personhood, then questions about human nature are ordered to it. There is something peculiar going on when scientific debunkers try to persuade us, appealing to reasons, that reason giving is just an evolutionary sideshow and that persons don't really matter. Philosophers call this a performative contradiction.

Insofar as both personhood and dignity are fundamental to Jewish understandings of what it is to be human, I see Judaism as a powerful ally in the search for a credible and credit-

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able, ennobling yet self-critical account of who and what we are. I therefore try to bring ancient wisdom to modern questions. Using Jewish sources, especially the Bible, its ancient rabbinic commentaries (the Midrash), and medieval as well as occasionally modern philosophical expressions of Judaism, I evoke a conception of human nature in which we can recognize ourselves as persons. I invite readers—Jews, Christians, secularists, and seekers—to consider what it has to offer.

Jewish Ideas

The Jewish tradition has a great deal to say about human nature, both explicitly and implicitly (in stories, laws, poetry, and prayer). “Well, of course,” a critic might rejoine. *Any* religious, literary, legal, moral, or cultural tradition (Judaism combines all of these) will be replete with understandings of human nature. But every one of them, our critic hastens to add, will also reflect a prescientific, folk-psychological point of view. No traditional material, especially material saturated with theistic assumptions, is up to the challenge of honestly engaging with modern Darwinian biology or neuroscience. The best that you, the Jewish thinker, can do is to play a divine-authority trump card—which will automatically disqualify you from participating in the conversation in the first place.

I disagree. But the critic does have a point. There is a gap, a large one, between traditional Jewish accounts of human nature and modern scientific and philosophical ones. Although there are scholarly and popular books that present Jewish teachings on this subject, it is not immediately clear how one

can use those teachings in the context of a contemporary science-shaped conversation.¹⁰ What, after all, do they really have to say to a person who takes their cues from contemporary scientific naturalism?

This question is hardly specific to Judaism. C. P. Snow spoke decades ago of the “two cultures” of science and the humanities—a bifurcation that all thoughtful modern Western people live with. Nor is it the primary business either of religious people *or* scientists, even religious ones, to reconcile what Sellars calls the “manifest” and “scientific” images of human beings.¹¹ It *is* the business of philosophers, however. There are those philosophers who hew closely to science and are willing to lose the first-person point of view as well as those who defend and affirm it (without, it should be noted, jettisoning science). With the latter, a Jewish philosopher can make common cause.

This book, then, is an essay in Jewish philosophy. Its focus is not human nature *in* Jewish thought, which would require only a compilation and discussion of Jewish texts bearing on the theme. Instead, it is a dialogue between contemporary perspectives and traditional Jewish ones. Both sides have something to gain from the dialogue; both have something to lose from shunning it. Judaism risks intellectual irrelevance by failing to engage with the challenges of contemporary thought. Contemporary thought risks attenuating its moral seriousness if it ignores one of the sources of Western civilization. From an internal, Jewish perspective, let me make it clear that I do not think that the credibility or dignity of Judaism rises and falls on its conformity with science, nor do I think

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that science has a monopoly on epistemic authority.¹² I do think that Judaism has rich insights into human nature and human personhood, and that these insights are well served by articulating them in a nonparochial way. I do not presume that Jewish ideas come with any intrinsic authority. The only authority they have is that of reason; they have the potential to persuade.

The charge that Jewish thought has only a divine-authority trump card to play is false. Philosophical expressions of Judaism find the rationality inherent in the Jewish sources and articulate it so that readers can evaluate it on its own merits. Religion, the late Richard Rorty said, is a “conversation stopper.”¹³ I don’t agree. Much of the cultural production of the human race over thousands of years is informed and motivated by religious belief. Even modern secular works, such as Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony or Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, are full of yearning for transcendence and redemption. Performances in concert halls or visits to museums have ritual dimensions. The presence of God, so to speak, is never far from the art, literature, and music of the millennia. Would Rorty claim that no work nourished by religious symbols, doctrines, experiences, emotions, or values is intelligible to us? That we cannot enter into a meaningful dialogue with texts or artifacts that speak out of a religious culture? Why then, does “God talk” among contemporaries shut down a dialogue? If people talk about their deepest hopes, concerns, and commitments, relating them to the ultimate purposes of their life and using the word God to do so, the proper response is to listen carefully and empathetically, not to stop the conversation.

It is no different with overt religious texts. Debunkers, such as Rorty, Steve Stewart-Williams, Richard Dawkins, or Laurence Krauss, insist on starting from the top down. A top-down reading begins with the problematic status of divine existence: if you can't prove that the God of scripture exists, then any religious statement that seems to presume divine existence is unwarranted or nonsensical. Religion is then written off as fantasy because its highest principle, God, is no more than wishful or magical thinking.

This approach to religious wisdom seems to me precisely backward. As opposed to making sure that all our ontological ducks are in a row before we can trust anything a religion says, we should see how its ideas play out in the context of moral and social life, how they gain their meaning by the roles they play.¹⁴ We should begin bottom up with the experience of personhood, and see how it is expressed by the world of religious—in our case, Jewish—ideas. Philosopher John Cottingham aptly calls this approach “the primacy of praxis.”¹⁵

The procedure that debunkers endorse—start with (the dubiousness of) divine existence and disparage everything putatively based on it—sometimes holds in life, but sometimes fails. If you are leaving the house and don't want to get wet, then you can check to see whether it is raining, and if it is, bring an umbrella. The matter can be settled by observation (though it also helps to have a belief in the efficacy of umbrellas). The evidence that would satisfy you is narrowly construed. Unless you are afflicted by skeptical doubts, you will be content with the ontological claim that it is raining now. A more complex case of the pertinence of observation and evi-

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dence is one where if theorizing has led you to believe that a certain particle—say, the Higgs boson—exists because its existence would offer the best explanation for a specific phenomenon, you can design an experiment to ascertain whether, in fact, the particle is detectable. This matter can also be settled by observation.

But now suppose that we are trying to make sense of the moral norms of a democratic society. Would we need to ascertain that rights *actually* exist in the same way that rain or Higgs bosons actually do? If rights do not exist in *that* way, would democratic moral norms suddenly become meaningless? Would talk about them be nonsense? Would we not instead think that the concept of rights, rather than naming some empirical reality on which all else depends, is an idea that plays a role in a complex process of evaluation, explanation, and practice conducted by persons? The existence of a right (or duty, obligation, promise, judgment, good, etc.) is not a stand-alone fact or fiction. It is a term that cannot be isolated from the role it plays in a form of life. What we need to do, if we are to be empathetic conversation partners, is enter into that form of life, be open to its rationality, allow its views and values room to breathe. We need to accord primacy to praxis. The search for understanding, contra religion's current cohort of cultured despisers, is not a blood sport; not everything is a competition among rival frameworks.

The appeal to interpretative charity cuts both ways. Traditional Jews might well be bothered by my stance that Jewish ideas, such as humans being created in the image of God, don't come with precertified authority, stamped with the prestige of

divine revelation. They may object that too much ground has been ceded to philosophy or science, and that Judaism only survives if its believers/practitioners are insulated from doubt. The steadfast affirmation of belief in the face of a culturally and intellectually corrupt secular world, not the meeting of it halfway, is what the hour demands. I disagree.¹⁶ As persons, we have no escape from the space of reasons. The view that Jews need to retreat from the “conversation of mankind,” as Michael Oakeshott called it, and defend Jewish commitments and beliefs from a fideistic bunker, is also a piece of an argument.¹⁷ It appeals to reasons; it conceals a philosophical stance. It is furthermore a weak stance, based on despair. It assumes that Jewish ideas are supported by nothing more than venerable just so stories, and that if you don’t believe those stories, such as the creation narratives of the Bible, there is nothing more to be said; the whole tradition unravels. That view in the end agrees with Rorty: religion is a conversation stopper.

Both New Atheists and traditional theists want certitude. Both think that there is definitive evidence that can be brought to bear in support of their positions. And both are unwilling to live without resolution. But certitude is not our birthright, nor does it come easily or cheaply. The desire for certitude arises from within our experience of perplexity, from within the interplay of light and dark, knowledge and ignorance, that always attends our quest for knowledge. The desire for certitude wants to override that interplay. It signals impatience with the shifting balance between the two; it represents a panic for resolution. We need to get over the panic. We can live, fully and well, with a lack of resolution. It’s not as if, lack-

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ing a certain, firm grasp on ultimate truths, we're prevented from beginning or going on. We make our way toward whatever certainties are possible for us from the middle, moving outward. The form of life that we lead is already saturated with norms, principles, beliefs, and convictions. We don't need the certitude of an ultimate truth, speaking to us as if from the outside. We criticize and revise our principles and beliefs from within. The statement that, for example, a human being is created in the image of God is not equivalent to "it is raining now." There is no outside truth maker for this claim. The "evidence" bearing on the truth of that statement is of an entirely different order. It is up to us to be guided by such an assertion, to respond to it, to make it true in our practice and orientation toward life. Praxis is primary.

Religious claims do not amount to the dogmatic bugbear of the debunkers. We should have the same openness, curiosity, and interpretative charity toward religious texts that we strive to have toward other texts as well as toward scientific theory. It is in that spirit that this inquiry into human nature and Jewish thought is conducted.

Looking Ahead

Working from the bottom up, this is a book about philosophical anthropology, not theology per se. (Pointedly, the modern Jewish thinker Abraham Joshua Heschel called the Bible a book about human beings, not about God.) The philosophical argument will proceed in two steps. The first step is to uphold the legitimacy of the "manifest image," that first-person

point of view in which we recognize ourselves as unique, valuable, self-aware, and (to a significant extent) self-determining moral agents. The second step is to encounter the Jewish materials as a rich portrayal of the manifest image and complex contribution to a first-person point of view. The plausibility of this depiction will rely not on the ultimately theistic convictions of the Jewish religious tradition but rather on their bottom-up resonance in our lives as persons.

Chapter 1 focuses on the reality of persons in a world of things. I begin and end with some relevant views drawn from the Jewish philosophers Buber (1878–1965), Heschel (1907–72), and Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903–93). Framed by the Jewish concerns, I turn to a philosophical exploration of human personhood. I first consider Sellars’s classic essay on the scientific and manifest images of “man-in-the-world.” Sellars shows how urgent and difficult it is to sustain a recognizable image of ourselves as persons in the face of scientism. With additional help from Nagel and Kant, I argue that persons cannot be conceptually scanted in a world of things. Notwithstanding the explanatory power of science, there is more to life than explanation. Explanation of what we are needs supplementing by a conception of who we are, how we should live, and why we matter. Those are questions to which Jewish sources can speak.

Chapter 2 develops a Jewish response to those questions. Using the motif of the *image of God* as an organizing principle, we will see how the sources address such issues as mind/body dualism, body and soul, the relation of human nature to animal nature, sexuality, birth and death, vulnerability and de-

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pendence, and violence and evil as well as selfhood and the relations among rationality, emotion, desire, and imagination.

Chapter 3 explores a key dimension of the portrayal developed in chapter 2—namely, moral agency. Against the hard determinism of modern scientism, classic Jewish sources affirm in a nuanced way the concept of free will. Since these sources have also sometimes endorsed a “soft-determinist” view (sometimes known as *compatibilism*), there is some common ground to be found on this complicated issue. How can we continue to embrace a belief in free will, with all that such a belief entails, and still give credence to the new sciences of the brain that qualify or even negate free will at the same time? Although ultimately Jewish sources must affirm personhood, agency, and moral responsibility, there is more than one simplistic way to do so.

Chapter 4 moves into the political and economic aspects of human nature. Given scarcity and interdependence, what sense has Judaism made of the material well-being necessary for human flourishing? What are Jewish attitudes toward prosperity, market relations, labor, and leisure? What has Judaism had to say about the political dimensions of human nature? If all humans are made in the image of God, what does that original equality imply for political order, authority, and justice? In what kinds of systems can human beings best flourish?

In the conclusion, I return to the theme of the worth or dignity of human life. What are the implications, in the face of the contemporary challenges of biotechnology and scientific materialism, of a Jewish understanding of human nature and human dignity for our common human future?