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## Chapter Seven

### **MAN: A HYPHENATE BEING OF SPIRIT AND BODY:**

#### **BACKGROUND REVIEW**

The strictly biblical view of the constitution of man is a hyphenate being composed of a body derived by procreation from parents, and a spirit derived by creation from God. According to this view man has a body and has a spirit, and by fusion of the two *becomes* a soul.<sup>125</sup> Such is the picture which is indicated generally in the Old Testament and formulated precisely in the New.

For centuries, this dualistic view of the human constitution as *to its components*, and this monistic view of the person as a *whole*, supplied a very satisfying picture of man's nature.<sup>126</sup> At death the two components — spirit and body — parted company; and the soul which their fusion had generated was presumed to continue a somewhat shadowy existence until the body was raised again to reconstitute the individual in his wholeness. Personal identity was preserved (a) because the spirit was in God's keeping and (b) because the body was to be resurrected in truly identifiable form.

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<sup>125</sup> For more discussion on this, see the author's *Two Men Called Adam*, especially chapter 7, p. 80 ff. (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, Doorway Publications, 1983).

<sup>126</sup> James Barr has this comment: "In Greek thought man is seen as a duality with an immortal soul imprisoned or confined in a mortal body; the two are only temporarily or accidentally related. In Hebrew thought the soul *is* the living person in his flesh." (*Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, London, SCM Press, 1960, p.18).

*Spirit and body: balanced emphasis needed:*

Since the Fall, however, man has never been able to preserve the proper balance in the relationship between the two components of his being. Throughout human history there has been a tendency to over-emphasize either his "spirituality" or his corporeality. I have put the word *spirituality* in quotation marks because I do not suggest that fallen man is a spiritual creature in the strictly Christian sense but only in the sense that the non-material side of his being has at certain times and in certain areas of the world been cultivated at the expense of the well-being of his body. At other times, the well-being of his body has virtually eclipsed concern for his spirit.

Man has thus constantly swung between a cerebral idealism that neglected the needs of the flesh, and an athleticism that neglected the importance of the spirit. Throughout Church history mind *or* body, rather than mind *and* body, has been the pattern.

Sin has divided what God had designed to be a functioning partnership. The spirit was intended to give unity to all the drives of the body and to give meaning and direction to its enormous potential for creative activity. But the spirit is too weak to give that direction. At the same time, sin has disrupted the functioning of the body itself, so that it no longer provides the spirit with the means to express itself effectively in fulfilling its calling in the material world.

As a result, the body and the spirit — each originally designed to benefit the other — have come to be in opposition (Galatians 5:17).<sup>127</sup> So serious is this conflict that man's headship of the natural order has been largely neutralized. In the original constitution of man, spirit and matter were to be in complete harmony.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that you cannot do the things that you would." Galatians 5:17.

<sup>128</sup> In his greatest hour of personal need, in that last terrible evening in Gethsemane, the Lord cried out for help — help for his spirit and help for his body. "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, nevertheless not my will but yours be done. And there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening Him." (Luke 22:42, 43.) Surely no angel strengthened his spirit: this was a strengthening of the body so that He might go through the coming physical ordeal. But in spirit, too, He had need of encouraging. "Now is my soul troubled: and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this place. Father, glorify your name. Then came there a voice from heaven saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." (John 12:27, 28.) This was his spiritual encouragement as he faced the ordeal.

But the Fall has divided man into two halves that are constantly in a state of warfare, a warfare about which Paul speaks so eloquently in chapter 7 of Romans.

Paul's answer to this conflict is a call to "present" our bodies to the Lord, not just our spirits (Romans 12:1).<sup>129</sup> It was characteristic of one period of early Church history in the Middle East that the body was no longer "presented" but deliberately "sacrificed," no longer offered in the service of the spirit but virtually denied as of any value whatever. Today, as the result of a movement in European history that began in the seventeenth century, there has emerged an ever increasing pre-occupation with the welfare of the *body*, while the things of the *spirit* have gradually been eclipsed. This movement has progressed so far that the soul of man is now effectively denied any significance whatever. As a consequence, in order to preserve the spiritual worth of man, the Christian has swung to the other extreme and has tended to neglect the body. The result is that neither secular society nor the Church has nurtured the whole man.

Whereas the total spiritualization of man (as witnessed in the early Church among the ascetics) had effectively annihilated man by destroying his wholeness, so today the total materialization of man (as witnessed in Behaviourism for example) would effectively annihilate man by its swing in the opposite direction. It seems that we can never preserve the balance, nor successfully cultivate man in his wholeness. The equal partnership of spirit and body which God intended is constantly being disregarded, and as a result the potential of the individual as a complete human being is seldom exhibited.

The unremitting conflict between soul and body between spirit and flesh — or whatever terms seem most appropriate — has provided the drive for many movements in human history (not the least of which was monasticism). Out of it have come some of the most extraordinary feats of human endurance in physical achievement: and out of it have come some of the most extraordinary examples of heroic dedication to ideals, both spiritual and intellectual. Men can readily be found who will gladly sacrifice spiritual development in order to cultivate bodily excellence (witness the Olympics); and others who will gladly sacrifice almost any physical comforts to preserve an ideal (for example, fighting for freedom) or to pursue an idea (witness the Curies).<sup>130</sup> The conflict between the two seems so often to require the sacrifice of one or the other. This has led many philosophers to view man not as a unitary being (as God intended him to be) but as an irreconcilable

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<sup>129</sup> "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Romans 12:1.

<sup>130</sup> Marie and Pierre Curie discovered radium (c. 1896-1903) leading to the development of radiography.

duality. For the same reason, Christians have often been strongly influenced not only to cultivate the spirit to the neglect of the body but, more importantly in the present context, to suppose that in heaven the body will play very little or no part at all in personal fulfillment. In either case, the constitution of man is fatally fragmented and redemption is seen as largely a purely spiritual matter — in spite of Romans 8:23.<sup>131</sup>

### *Descartes' influence*

The modern tendency to reduce man from the status of a responding person to a mere reacting thing, accountable entirely in terms of physics and chemistry and without transcendental value, may be said to have begun with Rene Descartes (1596 - 1650).

It is doubtful if he initially had any intention of sponsoring such a reductionist view. But the tendency towards reductionism was already present in many areas of thought and the very clarity of his reasoning helped to crystallize this tendency and harden it into a basic scientific principle.

Mechanistic explanation increasingly replaced the spiritual world view of Mediaeval times which the Renaissance had already undermined. The new sense of freedom from the constraints of theology, and the excitement of unrestricted intellectual inquiry which could be pursued without reference to the supernatural, was bound to work itself out to its logical conclusion. What was first merely ignored, was soon to be entirely denied.

There really is no half-way station which can accommodate the natural and the supernatural, or the physical and the metaphysical. Once the Christian position is abandoned — and philosophy firmly rejects revelation as an acceptable ingredient in the cake of truth — the slide into the grossest forms of mechanism and materialism is inevitable.

Descartes was deeply concerned with the problem of the precise relationship between mind and body. He recognized that the constitution of man was dualistic, and it involved two very different orders of reality: something which was clearly material — measurable, quantifiable — and something which was none of these things.

It was clear, to him, that the soul of man could command movement in the physical body but the question which absorbed his attention at first was how this *interaction* was achieved. If one can move one's hands at will merely by an act of thought, why can one not move the hands of the clock at will? What is the precise

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<sup>131</sup> A striking verse in the light of the above: “We ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the *spirit*, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our *body*.” (emphasis mine) Romans 8:23.

nature of the connection between the mind and the brain? What kind of a bridge could there be between what was purely physical and what was purely non-physical?

He quickly came to recognize that while the body could be treated as a machine, the soul could never be. The behaviour of the body was predictable to a remarkable extent: the behaviour of the spirit was virtually unpredictable. Since the criterion of all scientific understanding was predictability, and since this could be applied to the body but clearly not to the spirit, Descartes was forced to conclude that the method of science could be applied to physiology but not to psychology. Effectively, this meant that the spirit must simply be ignored as irrelevant to scientific enquiry. Descartes, therefore, proposed that the proper study of man must be limited to the study of his body, and that the body could be treated as nothing but an electrochemical heat engine whose operation was strictly accountable in terms of physics and chemistry.

The enormous success which resulted from the application (despite the limitation) of the scientific method to the study of the machinery of the body seemed to justify fully the disregard of the soul altogether. Thus arose the attitude vis-à-vis the nature of man which came to view him as a machine *and nothing but a machine*. The concept of reductionism simply means that everything must be accounted for — i.e., reduced to — the terms of physics and chemistry. It was a concept which until very recently coloured virtually all areas of thought almost as totally as the Christian Faith had once coloured all areas of thought in Medieval times.

Descartes thus established a pattern of thinking for those who followed in his steps. Man came to be treated as a soul-less machine; and the concept proved a remarkably fruitful step in the development of physiology. This success naturally reinforced and confirmed the basic assumption that had inspired it.

In so far as there appeared to be some substance to the idea that man had a soul, a centre of self-consciousness by which he at least was aware of his own identity and uniqueness, to this extent it became necessary to account for consciousness in the same terms. Behaviourism was the natural result of following out this principle with consistency. Consciousness or mindedness was merely a spin-off from the machinery of the body, a kind of static noise from the operation of the central nervous system, something that inevitably arises when matter reaches a certain level of organization.

So long as the psychologists claimed any measure of autonomy for the soul, they did not succeed in establishing a place for themselves within the scientific community. It was the desire to attain this standing that led to the development of *physiological* psychology, which occupied itself almost entirely with the study of the reflexes and the organs of sense (the eye, the ear, the nose, the taste buds, and all the tactile senses). It is still true that handbooks of experimental psychology are chiefly concerned with those aspects of human behaviour which tend to be quantifiable, clearly indicating the desire of the psychologists to be part and parcel of the

reductionist conspiracy. Strictly speaking, psychology, in spite of the fact that the very word signifies "study of the soul," has lost sight of the soul altogether; but for all that, it has not even yet been admitted as a science in the strict sense by the scientific community itself. Meanwhile, the identity of man as a person has been lost in the process.

### *Reductionism*

Only a century after Descartes, Julien de Lamettrie (1709 - 1751) was boldly declaring that soul was nothing more than a secretion of the brain and was therefore to be understood as merely part of the machinery of the body. A hundred years later Claude Bernard (1813 - 1878), another compatriot of Descartes and one of the most remarkable physiologists of his time, came to the conclusion that man must be treated entirely as a machine and that only thus would human nature ever be properly understood. He wrote:<sup>132</sup>

In living bodies as in inorganic bodies, laws are immutable and the phenomena governed by these laws are bound to the conditions on which they exist by a necessary and absolute determinism. If [physiologists] are thoroughly imbued with the truth of this principle, they will exclude all supernatural intervention from their explanations; they will have unshaken faith in the idea that fixed laws govern biological science. . . . Determinism thus becomes the foundation of all scientific progress and criticism.

In short, medical research and practice were both alike to be viewed no longer as *arts* with certain freedoms of assumption regarding the transcendent worth of the individual, but effectively as technologies operating on purely mechanistic principles. Man was a machine whose behaviour was predetermined entirely by the electrochemistry of his body. Only his *functions* had any importance; his destiny was irrelevant to any understanding of his nature.

Inspired by just such a mechanistic philosophy, physiological research made tremendous progress along certain lines — along just those lines which were amenable to this guiding principle. In due course a kind of *Manifesto* which was intended to steer all aspiring physiologists thenceforth, was issued by three leading

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<sup>132</sup> Bernard, Claude, *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*, translated by H.C. Greene, New York, Schuman, 1949, quoted by Seymour S. Kety, "A Biologist Examines the Mind and Behavior", *Science*, vol. 132, 1960, p. 1863.

scientists of the mid-nineteenth century. These were Carl Ludwig (1816 - 1895), who taught most of the great physiologists of the world active at that time; Emile du-Bois Reymand (1818 - 1896) who was the founder of electrochemistry; and Hermann von Helmholtz (1812 - 1894) who scarcely needs introduction. Here in a nutshell is what they agreed upon.<sup>133</sup>

All the activities of living material, *including consciousness* [emphasis mine], are ultimately to be explained in terms of physics and chemistry.

Ernst H. Haeckel (1834 - 1919) the German physiologist, encouraged by the progress which had resulted from this principle of inquiry, boldly informed the German Association (in 1877) that once all the chemical components of a cell — carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, and sulphur — are properly united, “they produce the soul and the body of the animated world and, suitably nursed, become man”.<sup>134</sup>

This, of course, effectively makes soul or spirit or consciousness an epiphenomenon of the body, a mere spin-off from an organism as soon as it has reached a stage of adequate complexity. This position was repeatedly affirmed by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825 - 1895) in London. He observed, "Thoughts are the expression of molecular changes in that material of life which is the source of our other vital phenomena."<sup>135</sup> And again, "Mind is a function of matter when that matter has attained a certain degree of organization."<sup>136</sup> And once more, "Thought is as much a function of matter as motion is."<sup>137</sup> In short, man is wholly accountable in terms of molecules. When he dies, he returns to the dust, and there is in man no such thing as an independent soul or spirit which survives the disintegration of the body. The vital distinction between man and animal which is displayed in the

<sup>133</sup> The Manifesto as reported by Chauncey D. Leake, “Perspectives in Adaptation: Historical Background” in *Handbook of Physiology*, Section 4, *Adaptation to the Environment*, Washington, D.C., American Physiology Society, 1964, p.5,6.

<sup>134</sup> Ernst Haeckel: quoted by Stanley L. Jaki, *The Relevance of Physics*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1966, p. 310.

<sup>135</sup> Huxley, T.H., “On the Physical Basis of Life” in his *Lay Sermons*, London, 1870, p. 152.

<sup>136</sup> Huxley, T.H., “Mr. Darwin’s Critics,” *Contemporary Review*, London, Nov., 1871, p.464.

<sup>137</sup> Huxley, T.H., “Descartes” in his *Lay Sermons*, London, 1870, p. 371.

divergent destinies of their spirits (Ecclesiastes 3:21)<sup>138</sup> is entirely undermined by this line of reasoning.

Such is the inevitable result of pursuing a course of research which encourages the thought that one can study man's body without making any allowance for an independent soul of which it is both housing and servant. Man, like all other living things (it is concluded) is simply a machine accountable in terms of "sticks and strings." He is an accidental byproduct of a mindless process that certainly did not have him in view. In due course, when all available energy in the universe has been exhausted, man will have vanished entirely as though he had never existed. He thus has no transcendental worth nor the slightest significance in the light of this meaningless drama. Increasing numbers of serious people were soon left without any firm basis for a sense of moral responsibility and certainly without the slightest prospect of a future life in which the inequities of *this* life would be balanced out with justice. Accordingly, there was no need whatever to fear a judgment to come, and morals were reduced to mores as right and wrong became matters entirely of social expedient.

Bertrand Russell (1872 - 1970) was spokesman for this dismal philosophy when he boldly asserted:<sup>139</sup>

That man is the product of causes which had no pre-vision of the end they were achieving: that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms: that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought or feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave: that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the aspirations, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins — all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand.

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<sup>138</sup> “Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?” Ecclesiastes 3:21. See also later, in speaking of man’s death: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Ecclesiastes 12:7.

<sup>139</sup> Bertrand Russell: quoted by J.W.N. Sullivan, *Limitations of Science*, Harmondsworth, Pelican Books, 1938, p. 175.

But this enormous pessimism had within itself the seeds of its own destruction, and a shift in direction ultimately became inevitable.

*The pendulum swings*

One of the greatest of all physiologists who came out of this environment was Sir Charles Sherrington (1857 - 1952). He began his intensive research into the functioning of the central nervous system quite convinced that the phenomenon of consciousness is merely the "static" of brain cell activity. Consciousness would end with the disintegration of the brain and any idea of persistence of the soul through death had to be abandoned.

But over a very long life of extremely fruitful experimental research which made him a legend in his own time, he slowly and cautiously began to admit to himself that the purely mechanistic view of man's nature did not entirely account for the evidence. At first he merely ignored the soul; but later towards the end of his life he wrote his classic "swan song" which he titled *Man On His Nature*, and here he very guardedly admitted the existence and autonomy of *soul*, though he did not publicly broach the idea.<sup>140</sup>

Just before he died, his thinking had clearly begun to crystallize in a new direction. Only five days before he went to his reward, he made a confession privately to one of his pupils, Sir John C. Eccles who was himself by now a Nobel Laureate in neurophysiology. Sherrington admitted to him: "For me, now, the *only* reality is the human soul."<sup>141</sup>

What a profound change this represents! For perhaps a hundred years physiologists with few exceptions had been agreeing that the only reality was the human body. Now the acknowledged prince of neurophysiologists had finally come to precisely the opposite conclusion. . . . It is really the soul<sup>142</sup> that counts. The body is not the generator of the soul but the soul's vehicle of development and expression.

The soul is co-ordinator of all bodily activities and the agent of all its purposeful behaviour. Soul, in short, accounts quite as truly for the meaningful functioning of the body as the body does for the effective functioning of the soul.

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<sup>140</sup> For Sherrington's admission, see Wilder Penfield, *The Second Career*, Toronto, Little, Brown & Company, 1963, p. 74, 75

<sup>141</sup> This was said to Eccles on Feb. 24, 1952. See Sir John Eccles, *Facing Reality: Philosophical Adventures of a Brain Scientist*, New York, Springer-Verlag, 1975, p. 174.

<sup>142</sup> To be precise, the word 'soul' here (and subsequently) should be 'spirit'; for 'soul' refers not just to the spirit but to *both* spirit and body, the whole person. Soul is what results from the fusion of body and spirit, which thus constitutes the person.

And if any precedence exists for the one or the other, it must finally go to the soul.<sup>143</sup>  
The body must be servant, not master — or as the Latin would have it, *ministerium*,  
*non magisterium*.

### *Summary*

Whichever way the pendulum has swung, either towards a purely spiritual view of man to the neglect of the body (which is often the Christian tendency) or towards a mechanistic view of man to the denial of any spiritual reality (which is certainly the scientific tendency), the end result has been the same. In this life man is fragmented and largely cancelled out. And in the life to come, either an anomalous scenario for the period between death and resurrection has had to be invented with ambivalent feelings regarding the importance of the body and only a shadowy interim existence for the soul, OR outright denial of any kind of life after death whatsoever.

But as we shall see in the next chapter, there is a beginning of a decided shift in certain quarters regarding the true nature of man's constitution, a shift which resulted from a succession of recent experimental findings which were certainly not anticipated.

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<sup>143</sup> This is how Thomas Aquinas expressed it: “Though the soul’s intrinsic existence does not depend on the body, this union appears most necessary for the sake of its proper activity, which is to understand. Were it of the soul’s nature to receive ideas from the influence of bodiless principles and not to acquire them through the senses, there would be no need of the body; for the soul to be united to the body would serve no purpose.” (*Saint Thomas Aquinas: Philosophical Texts*, edited and translated by Thomas Gilby, Oxford University Press, 1967, p.233, at entry #630).