

MAN—WOLF OR SHEEP?

The question whether man is wolf or sheep is only a special formulation of a question which, in its wider and more general aspects, has been one of the most basic problems of Western theological and philosophical thought: Is man basically evil and corrupt, or is he basically good and perfectable? The Old Testament does not take the position of man's fundamental corruption. Adam and Eve's *disobedience* to God are not called sin; nowhere is there a hint that this disobedience has corrupted man. On the contrary, the disobedience is the condition for man's self-awareness, for his capacity to choose, and thus in the last analysis this first act of disobedience is man's first step toward freedom. It seems that their disobedience was even within God's plan; for, according to prophetic thought, man just *because* he was expelled from Paradise is able to make his own history, to develop his human powers, and to attain a new harmony with man and nature as a fully developed individual instead of the former harmony in which he was *not yet* an individual. The Messianic concept of the prophets certainly implies that man is not fundamentally corrupt and that he can be saved without any special act of God's grace. But it does not imply that this potential for good will necessarily win. If man does evil he becomes more evil. Thus, Pharaoh's heart "hardens" because he keeps on doing evil; it hardens to a point where no more change or repentance is possible. The Old Testament offers at least as many examples of evil-doing as of right-doing, and does not exempt even exalted figures like King David from the list of evil doers. The Old Testament view is that man has both capacities—that of good and that of evil—and the man must choose between good and evil, blessing and curse, life and death. Even God does not interfere in his choice; he helps by sending his messengers, the prophets, to teach the

norms which lead to the realization of goodness, to identify the evil, and to warn and to protest. But this being done, man is left alone with his “two strivings,” that for good and that for evil, and the decision is his alone.