Free Will and Evolution Theory

□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ □□□□ □□□□□ □□□□

Hilkhot Teshuba, 5:4

Yesterday, we explained that the difference between humans and all other living beings is “free will”. The freedom to make moral decisions, places man above nature. In Nature “determinism” rules and reigns. Man is NOT part of nature. Man is “supernatural”.

Free will, from a more philosophical angle, is evidence of “Divine Design”. In other words, a living being with freedom of choice can not be the product of an evolutionary process.

Firstly, because for the theory of evolution we are considered an integral part of nature, where everything is guided by instincts. We are not a unique specie, which transcends nature, designed to reach the Divine. We are “monkeys, with a little bit more intelligence.”

Secondly, free will runs against the fundamental principle of the theory of evolution: the survival of the fittest. Since moral freedom of choice means that a human being can choose, for example, sacrificing his biological needs, or even his own life, for an “ideal”. This is completely contrary to the evolutionary principle of “survival”.

It is no wonder then that for Judaism free will is the human characteristic that bring us closer to God. Midrash Tanhuma explains that “the image and likeness of God” which we humans possess is our “freedom of choice”.

Nor is it surprising that those men and women of science who are identified with atheism, would vehemently oppose the idea of free will and would try to prove that it does not exist. An American scientist Benjamin Libet conducted an experiment in 1979 to show that what determines our actions and decisions are unconscious brain processes. The phenomenon of “consciousness”, or making an independent decision, outside the dictates of the brain, is only an illusion. Thus, the less freedom of choice there is, the more animals we are, which is in line with the theory of evolution.

Probably many readers have never heard this argument in such a

direct way. But if you stop to observe certain ideological debates, characteristic of our modern society, your will notice that the issue of “free will” is, in a direct or indirect way, very present in most discussions about morality. Those who do not believe in God would justify many moral (or immoral) behaviors claiming that they are innate, uncontrollable conditions. While those who believe in God, would claim that we humans possess the capacity to change, control, and modify our tendencies.

The basic question in this issue is, whether there is something more than the brain in the decision-making process. If the decision maker is the brain, then we are just intelligent animals, as evolutionists say. But if there is something beyond the brain, call it “consciousness”, then we are something other than “nature”, we are above it.

From the Jewish point of view, the brain is not the “I”. The brain is a vehicle, or perhaps the most valuable instrument, of the true “I” that is our consciousness, or in Hebrew “neshama.” The interaction between our consciousness / neshama and our brain is an issue that goes beyond what we can say in these few lines. But briefly: our brain sends signals, for example, that we are starving, but our “consciousness” has the power to make the call and decide “not to eat”, because today is Yom Kippur. Our brain can be stimulated by hormonal urges, but our consciousness has the power to control the response to such urges. The true self is not the the one that produces or sends the electrochemical signals or processes stimuli. Our “I” is the entity that despite the signals or the stimuli can say “NO”.

MORE ON “EVOLUTION AND FREE WILL”

In his book “The Descent of Man” published in 1871, Darwin said that ” “it cannot be maintained that the social instincts [moral principles] are ordinarily stronger in man… than the instincts… of self-preservation, hunger, lust, vengeance”

In the words of William Provine, Professor of History of Biology, Cornell University, “Naturalistic evolution has clear consequences that Charles Darwin understood perfectly… [including the idea that] human free will is nonexistent….”

In this short video clip you can watch Dr. Provine defining the implications of the modern theory of evolutionary biology (evolution)

If there is no God,
There is no life after this life,
There is no objective justification for ethics or morality,
Our lives do not have any transcendental meaning,
There is no free will.

