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Introduction

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> Rabbinic [language] has no literal equivalent for the Pauline "flesh and spirit" (σάρξ and πνεῦμα), but in many cases it corresponds to the "Good and Evil Inclination," which occurs extremely frequently in Rabbinic literature.[1]

So Strack and Billerbeck began their excursus on the *yeṣer* in their influential *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*. They attempt to trace the origins of the rabbinic concept of an internal struggle between two forces within the human being, one inclination that is good and one that is evil, finding an equivalent in earlier Hellenistic concepts. Their comments exemplify two of the major methodological weaknesses that dogged earlier scholarship on the Evil Inclination – a tendency on the one hand to read rabbinic sources from different times and places as an undifferentiated synthesis, and an overenthusiasm for perceiving in superficial similarities concrete parallels and the marks of direct borrowings, on the other.

The work of Rosen-Zvi on the *yeṣer* over recent years (cited frequently in this volume) has set about remedying particularly the first of these two deficiencies by carefully unpicking the chronological layers of rabbinic literature and differentiating between the two principal geographical settings of early rabbinic Judaism, Roman Palestine and Babylonia.[2] This work opened up new possibilities for identifying the origins of the concept of an "Evil Inclination" and its development in pre-rabbinic Judaism; for comparing Jewish ideas with thought patterns

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[1] "Fur das paulinische 'Fleisch u. Geist' (σάρξ and πνεῦμα) hat das Rabbinische kein wortliches Aquivalent, es deckt sich aber vielfach mit dem in der rabbinischen Literatur ungemein haufig vorkommenden 'bosen u. guten Trieb'" (Str-B 4: 466–83).

[2] See, e.g., Rosen-Zvi 2008, 2009, and 2011.

in nascent Christianity; and for exploring the uses of the *yeṣer* in important Jewish works from Late Antiquity outside the classic rabbinic corpus (e.g. Targum and *piyyut*).

It was with these three aims in mind that an international conference was convened at the University of Cambridge in September 2014. The contributors were carefully selected, and each was asked to examine afresh a corpus of materials in which she or he has particular expertise. Some additional papers were commissioned by the editors after the conference to ensure a comprehensive, coherent, and integrated treatment of the subject. We are glad to present the results in the current volume. The participants considered how their materials evidenced dependence on earlier traditions, how they differed from or reacted to ideas found in other corpora, how they reflected trajectories that are more fully developed in later literatures, and the extent to which the ideas that they embody were shaped by the cultures in which Judaism and Christianity were embedded (in particular, Hellenistic, Sasanian, and Roman). Many of the contributions find unexpected relations between different compositions, Jewish and Christian, in the context of explanations for human sinfulness, thus necessitating a rethinking of the connection and borders between genres and cultures in Late Antiquity. The results of this collaborative approach therefore mark an important new contribution to our understanding of the development of Jewish and Christian thought on the nature of human sinfulness, a major theological category.

Both Jewish and Christian sources rely on certain key biblical passages as they develop traditions connected to the Evil Inclination, and so a logical place to start our investigation was with a thorough reexamination of the semantics of some of the key terminology in the Hebrew Bible. The fundamental question of the meaning of the Hebrew יצר (*yeṣer*) is addressed by Noam Mizrahi. Mizrahi examines its meanings in Biblical Hebrew before the undoubted development in semantic range that is seen in Sirach, Qumran, and in Rabbinic Hebrew. He suggests that it would be wrong to interpret the word in the key passages in Genesis (6:5, 8:21) as denoting the human mental faculty. Rather, in line with the meaning of the verb as "to fashion" and the uses of the noun elsewhere as a manufactured product, in Genesis 6 and 8 the *yeṣer* denotes the products of human civilization. This is in keeping with the sense of *yeṣer* elsewhere, but in the context it takes on a dark foreboding, as they are products that are specifically condemned by God. It thus can be seen that in Classical Biblical Hebrew the term underwent a semantic change, from denoting the work and products of a potter to the making of objects by other

artisans. The psychologized extension in meaning is not attested in the classical corpus, and is to be attributed to post-biblical developments. Therefore, as far as the use of the term *yeṣer* is concerned, the distance between biblical and post-biblical literature is even greater than is commonly thought.

It might be expected that in the Septuagint, the first books of which were translated in the third century and the rest in the centuries that followed, signs of the developing notion of the inclination would be seen. James Aitken notes how the translation was made near to the time when the semantic change is seen in the Hebrew version of Sirach, but that despite this very little scholarly attention has been given to the Septuagint in studies of the *yeṣer*. Greek lexicographic tools have too easily at times opted for meanings in the Greek that seem to derive from the later rabbinic understanding than from a thorough semantic analysis. Throughout most of the Septuagint a standard default rendering of the Hebrew is chosen: words signifying a fashioned product, in accord with the prime meaning in Biblical Hebrew. In the Greek of Sirach a shift is detectable from a fashioned product to an internalized sense of "will, desire." Most striking are the renderings of the two parade passages in Genesis (6:5, 8:21), where the translator clearly sees a connection between the two passages by translating them in similar ways that are interpretative of the Hebrew source text. Although these two passages as rendered in the Septuagint cannot be interpreted in the full rabbinic sense, they already reveal in the third century BCE a recognition of human frailty in controlling the will.

The two chapters on the Second Temple period by Benjamin Wold and Loren Stuckenbruck offer important examinations of some key concepts and terminology in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Enochic traditions that foreshadow the rabbinic conception of the *yeṣer*. Wold examines in detail two terms appearing in various Thanksgiving Hymns as well as in 4QInstruction: "Fleshly Spirit" and "Vessel (יצר) of Flesh." These two cryptic terms, which appear nowhere else in Ancient Jewish literature, were interpreted as conveying a stark dualistic worldview. Wold rejects this interpretation, claiming instead that the terms express distance between the unenlightened and base human being as a whole and the divine. It thus uses these two unique expressions to rethink Qumranic anthropology. The chapter also uncovers deep connections between Thanksgiving Hymns and 4QInstruction not observed in scholarship. The shared use of rare vocabulary suggests not just a common cultural milieu, but also a direct knowledge of 4QInstruction by the hymns. At the same time, this proximity also reveals the differences in worldview

between the compositions, the hymns being much more negative, project-ing an anthropology that radically separates "us" and "them."

Given their significance in the development of rabbinic thinking about the *yeṣer*, critical attention needed to be given to interpretations of the first chapters of the book of Genesis in the Second Temple period. In his chapter Stuckenbruck compares, both textually and phenomenologically, the Enochic traditions regarding humans and their place in the cosmos with the account in Genesis 1–9. In respect of the former Stuckenbruck finds clear (if implicit) traces of the Genesis account in the Book of Watchers. As for the latter, he analyzes the differences between the accounts, mainly the presentation of humans as victims rather than as a source of evil. In the Book of Watchers personified forces of evil are held accountable for human suffering. This leads to Enochic overlooking of both the idea of human creation in God's likeness and the divine regret that humanity was created in Gen 6:6. But the major difference between the two accounts concerns eschatology. While Genesis does not show any interest in linking the universal *Urzeit* with a similar *Endzeit*, the Enochic eschatological vision includes all humanity. After analyzing the Book of Watchers (1 En 1–16), Stuckenbruck moves to subsequent parts of First Enoch, showing how these compositions adapted the universal vision of the third century BCE into the turmoil of the second (the rise of Antiochus IV in the 170s and the Maccabean Revolt in the 160s BCE) and later, while preserving much of the Enochic unique worldview.

The focus on the Greek cultural context of Alexandria in Aitken's contribution is picked up again in Sharon Weisser's chapter on Philo of Alexandria, one of the first and most important Jewish interpreters of the Bible. Weisser examines the origins of moral evils in Philo's thought, where we see a conjunction between the naturalistic vantage point of ancient philosophy and that of the particularism of Jewish philosophy. The influence of Greek philosophy in Philo leads to his seeing the origin of vice lying in the passions of the soul, which are connected to the embodied human condition. The existence of the passions is explained by two interconnected reasons: the embodied condition of man on the one hand, and an impaired epistemological state of the agent on the other. In part vice arises from a wrong valuation of the physical realm: the pleasure and pain associated with the senses lead the agent to believe that what is pleasant should be pursued and what is painful should be avoided. Furthermore, improper philosophical argumentation constitutes, in Philo's eyes, one of the main causes of ignorance and hence of irrational and vicious conduct. For the agent to regain rationality and to oppose the

recalcitrance of his material condition, the best path is to endorse the true philosophy, that is, the Law of Moses. The Torah, as the best and most detailed expression of the law of nature, is the dogmatic solution provided by Philo for the corrupted characters of both the soul and of philosophy in his time.

As we reach the end of the Second Temple period, Ishay Rosen-Zvi helps set the stage for a comparative examination of the nascent rabbinic and Christian thought-worlds, by sketching Tannaitic characterizations of the *yeṣer* and offering some reflections on the methodological challenges that a project such as this one presents. Rosen-Zvi begins by summarizing his findings on the Tannaitic *yeṣer* and responds to critique of his book on the topic, *Demonic Desires*. His main thesis is that in Tannaitic sources the *yeṣer* is not characterized as a "blind and unbridled passion" but as a sophisticated operator, which entices humans to every kind of sin, sometimes by deploying (quasi-)halakhic arguments. Unlike demons, which account for external dangers (e.g. illness, suffering), the *yeṣer* is therefore answerable for human sinfulness. Humans have the ability to fight the *yeṣer* and prevail with the aid of tools such as adjuration (oaths, vows) and Torah study. In terms of its anthropology, Tannaitic literature presents the *yeṣer* residing within humans, while remaining an independent entity.

Having outlined his main thesis, Rosen-Zvi turns to methodological questions. First, he considers how one should evaluate the a priori resemblances between the *yeṣer*'s modus operandi and the role played by demons in some early Christian writings (e.g. Origen). Rosen-Zvi is inclined to see such resemblances as purely phenomenological, while others would argue for a genetic link. Second, Rosen-Zvi considers how literally or otherwise one ought to take rabbinic descriptions of the *yeṣer*'s physicality. Rejecting the category of metaphor, he argues that they should be read literally and located in the realm of myth. Finally, Rosen-Zvi responds to Kister's critique of his claim about the novelty of the Tannaitic *yeṣer*. Rosen-Zvi acknowledges that components of the rabbinic concept of the *yeṣer* are foreshadowed in Second Temple times, but argues that it is precisely the combining of these components in Tannaitic thought and the integration of the *yeṣer* into a wider rabbinic anthropology that has resulted in something genuinely novel.

With the methodological groundwork in place, we are able to turn our attention to the literature of nascent Christianity, beginning with the works of Paul. Conscious of the risk of "parallelomania," of which much earlier studies on the Pauline corpus fell foul, Daniel Schumann

adopts a method of "word field" analysis in order to consider the relevance of the rabbinic concept of the *yeṣer* for Paul's reflections on the human tendency to sin. Focusing on a selection of key texts, he concludes that the language of "desire" (ἐπιθυμία) in 1 Thessalonians and the flesh/spirit antithesis in Galatians are best understood against the backdrop of Greek philosophy rather than rabbinic notions of an evil intrapersonal force. Similarly, he argues that fundamentally different approaches to the Law sharply distinguishes Paul's language of malevolent external forces (particularly "sin") in his letter to the Romans from the rabbinic understanding of *yeṣer*: whereas Tannaitic sources regard the Law as an antidote to the Evil Inclination, Paul identifies the Law as a catalyst. Schumann's conclusion is stark and will doubtless engender further debate, especially among adherents of the "New Perspective on Paul": He writes, "Paul either did not know of the rabbinic יצר concept or, if he knew of the יצר, he chose not to use it in expressing his own thought."

Weisser's chapter on Philo of Alexandria is complemented well by the contribution of George van Kooten, who revisits the notion of the δίψυχος, the double-minded nature of human beings in the Letter of James (1.8, 4.8), which has long been connected in scholarship with the rabbinic notion of "the two inclinations." He suggests that it does not suit well the Hebrew notion of a double heart, which is better translated by other terms; rather, it conveys a notion of the soul and mind. Van Kooten traces the idea of the double soul through Xenophon, Plato, and the Stoics, and observes its adoption in Platonists such as Plotinus. It finds Jewish expression in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, first in a passage on the two spirits or powers, and second in a section where Philo finds confirmation for his Platonic view of the duality of the soul in the Pentateuch. Against these backgrounds the Letter of James can be seen as partaking in a specific Greek discourse of divine simplicity in opposition to the double-minded nature of humans, a discourse deeply influenced by the Platonic notion of the divided self. It may be that, like Philo, James participated in Jewish and Greek discourses, and that if he were familiar with anything akin to the rabbinic notion of the two *yeṣarim* he transmitted it in terms of Greek conceptions of the divided self. Thus, Jewish anthropology proved to be compatible with Greek reflections.

Three chapters focus on Jewish and Christian literature from the second and early third centuries CE. Research on the Evil Inclination has focused mainly on texts from the Talmud and Midrash, with the result that the Aramaic Targums have been largely neglected, despite their importance as repositories of traditional Jewish exegesis. Hector

Patmore focuses his attention on those Targums that have their origins in the Tannaitic period, with a view to shedding light on the date of the Targumic traditions and the nature of their relationship to mainstream rabbinic literature. While Targum Onqelos simply uses the Aramaic cognate noun when it encounters *yeṣer* in the Hebrew, Targum Jonathan characterizes the *yeṣer* as a stumbling block and the source of disturbing thoughts, hinting at its antinomian nature. Both envisage a single *yeṣer*, which they treat as a normal human tendency, rather than a distinct external entity. Patmore concludes that their portrayal of the *yeṣer* reflects the early Tannaitic period. Turning to the Palestinian Targum traditions, Patmore examines an exegetical tradition that holds the *yeṣer* responsible for prompting Cain to murder his brother. He argues that this tradition reflects a more developed understanding of the *yeṣer*, suggesting a late Tannaitic or early Amoraic date.

Careful analysis of Christian literature roughly contemporaneous with these Targums is offered in chapters by Timothy Pettipiece and Monika Pesthy-Simon. Pettipiece examines the rise of theologies in the second century CE that focused on metaphysical explanations for evil rather than the human will as the source. Such "gnostic" theologies inextricably linked evil with their cosmogonic understandings, and address the question of Christian indebtedness to Judaism. They subverted the traditional Judaic notion of a benign creator God, and instead saw the creator, or Demiurge, as an impostor who conspired to prevent humans from acquiring knowledge of the true God hidden in the divine realm beyond the cosmos. This malevolent Demiurge, as he was often called, was said to be the product of a disastrous degeneration of divine being, and the world that he fashioned, including human beings themselves, was seen as deficient if not outright evil. Pettipiece traces this movement to place the responsibility for sin and evil on humanity and not the deity or his creation. It comes at a crucial time for the early Christian movement. In the second century Christianity was increasingly coming to the attention of Roman authorities, which accused Christians of abandoning the ways of their ancestors. As a counter to this claim Christians sought to maintain a link to their Jewish heritage, and especially its scriptures. They put forward a new way to solve the problem of evil, one which exonerated divinity and implicated humanity, and as a result one that made sin and evil not a matter of nature but of will.

Despite recognizing the inherent problem in the definition and scope of the term "Christian Apocrypha," Pesthy-Simon underlines how important a source they are, forming as they do a unique witness to early

Christian literature. She focuses on texts from the second and third centuries, a period constituting the transition between the New Testament and the development of systematic patristic thought. While there is no specific notion of the Evil Inclination, there are some notable passages describing how evil operates in the world. She examines such passages from the Acts of Andrew, the Acts of Peter, the Acts of Thomas, and the Apocalypse of Paul. In most cases there appear to be parallel developments in ideas rather than direct connections with rabbinic notions. If, as Rosen-Zvi argues, the rabbinic *yeṣer* is a phenomenon that is part of a wider development in the placing of demons inside the human psyche, the Apocryphal literature is not fully aligned with such a development. Satan or demons are not yet fully internalized: the enemy remains external, though able to act inside the human being to instigate him to sin from within. A passage in the Acts of Thomas found only in the Syriac version comes the closest to the description of the Amoraic *yeṣer* (*Acts Thom.* 34,1a–f), including as it does sexual transgression. Its origins in East Syria would have allowed for influence from Jewish sources.

A volume considering the influence of Jewish concepts on the emergence of Christian ideas could hardly neglect Origen, who is well known for his (often quite detailed) familiarity with Jewish interpretations of Scripture and for his direct contacts with Jews in Alexandria and Caesarea. Riemer Roukema takes on this task, reconstructing Origen's views on the origin of sin and the human proclivity to evil, principally on the basis of his systematic exposition of the Christian faith, *On First Principles*. Roukema argues that Origen took the view that God had first created creatures that were both spiritual and rational; later these fell away from God as a result of negligence and became attached to material human bodies (a view for which he was later anathematized), with the result that the soul now finds itself between the spirit and the flesh, and can orient itself to either of them. There is certainly a prima facie resemblance to the rabbinic concept of the two *yeṣarim*. Yet as Roukema shows it is Plato, Paul, and to a lesser extent Philo and the Gospels, that provided the basis of Origen's anthropology, not nascent rabbinic models.

Equally essential to any discussion concerned with the overlap of Jewish and Christian traditions in Late Antiquity is Jerome. Robert Hayward carefully combs through the fine detail of the Vulgate to bring to light Jerome's understanding of the word *yeṣer*. Hayward delves into Jerome's commentaries and the works of his contemporaries, both Jewish and Christian, as well as the other ancient translations (Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus, etc.) in order to demonstrate how Jerome wrestled

with the Hebrew text in order to bring out its *sensus*: Jerome's is no mechanical translation, but a diligent and skillful work of philology and exegesis. Although the genre precludes a systematic presentation of the concept, Hayward is able to show that Jerome places the word *yeṣer* primarily in the semantic domain of human meditation and thinking, though he also connects it with human volition and, on one occasion, with idolatry. The possibility that some of Jerome's thinking was shaped by direct engagement with Jewish conversation partners is an important result. It certainly suggests that, were the massive task of sifting Jerome's other writings for evidence of the *yeṣer* to be undertaken, this could well turn up further exciting results.

Important and unexpected results are brought to light by Augustine Casiday, in his study of Jerome's contemporary, Evagrius Ponticus. Casiday analyzes Evagrius' concept of the eight *logismoi*. He develops and qualifies Antoine Guillaumont's radical argument, in his 1971 edition of Evagrius' *Praktikos*, that the doctrine of *logismoi* should be compared not to Greek philosophy (where *logismos* has only positive meanings), but to the biblical and post-biblical concepts of *yeṣarim* (along with concepts of penetrating demons, as developed by Christian predecessors such as Origen and Anthony). The author builds on his previous studies of Evagrius, arguing for his deep interest, mostly unacknowledged by scholarship, in Hebrew language and Jewish practices. Casiday develops and sharpens similarities and differences between Evagrius' *logismoi* and rabbinic *yeṣer* suggested by Rosen-Zvi. For Evagrius, unlike the early rabbis, the *logismoi* are not inherently evil, but neutral, and even, in and of themselves, good, before being taken over by demonic forces. Casiday's nuanced and critical return to Guillaumont's thesis demands no less than a reevaluation of the relationships between Jewish and Christian anthropologies in Late Antiquity.

The thought of Origen (perhaps also Evagrius) may well have left its mark in the writings of Augustine, whom Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe examines in her contribution. Unlike his famous account of "original sin," Augustine's narration of the individual, personal sins is much more conflicted and ambiguous. These two spheres are for him both separated and causally connected, on the grounds that original sin had had various weakening effects on post-lapsarian humans. Lunn-Rockliffe narrates the various accounts in Augustine of personal sins, concentrating on the place of demonology in them, in particular Augustine's claim that emotions could be stirred up by demons. Augustine combines Stoic language with biblical stories (Adam and Eve, Judas), in an attempt to account for the

diabolic side of sinfulness without however compromising human agency. Lunn-Rockliffe locates Augustine's different explanations in their polemical contexts: first with Manicheism and then with Pelagianism. Against the former, he was keen to repudiate anything reminiscent of Manichean anthropology, which suggested that from the moment of his creation there had been something rotten in the matter of humanity. Against the latter, he stressed that Adam and Eve's sin did indeed affect humans by weakening their ability to will the good, and thus they are in a constant need of God's grace. The combination of these two contexts leads to his dialectical and conflicted account. Lastly, Lunn-Rockliffe compares Augustine's solution to the rabbinic *yeṣer*, uncovering both similarities and differences between the two solutions, to the shared problem of human sinfulness and its psychological and demonological origins.

The examination of Christian sources is completed by the contribution of David Taylor, who examines Syriac sources ranging chronologically from the second century to the medieval period. Taylor focuses in his study on the term *yaṣrā* (a Syriac translation equivalent for Hebrew *yeṣer*) in early Syriac Christian literature. He begins his analysis with the Peshitta, which played a key role in establishing the early Syriac understanding of *yaṣrā*, arguing that in the Peshitta *yaṣrā* functions as a technical term borrowed from Jewish anthropology. Taylor's broad survey of Syriac sources shows that the term was rapidly taken up in the Syriac tradition and, with a few exceptions, is found in almost all early Syriac writers. Taylor goes on to discuss the use of *yaṣrā* in a selection of important early Syriac writers (e.g. Aphrahat, Ephrem). He pays particular attention to the works of the poet and theologian Narsai, for whom *yaṣrā* was a key anthropological and philosophical concept, reflecting a particular interest in the term among writers of the Church of the East. Taylor shows that, in contrast to medieval sources in which the *yaṣrā* was normally treated as an author of evil, the earliest Syriac texts generally regard the *yaṣrā* as morally neutral. Yet, although the *yaṣrā* is capable of inspiring both good and bad behavior, it more commonly provokes the bad. The *yaṣrā* therefore is something with which human free will must wrestle; like the rabbinic *yeṣer*, it can ultimately be controlled and defeated. Of particular importance in the context of this volume is Taylor's conclusion that, while the Syriac texts reflect a distinctive development within the context of Christian exegesis and theology, there are many striking points of contact with post-biblical Jewish thought.

Taylor's contribution dovetails perfectly with that of Ophir Münz-Manor, who examines a group of liturgical poems written in Hebrew,