

Christianity And Idealism

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Preface

From time to time I have written on the relation of idealist philosophy to Christianity. It is obvious that such philosophies as materialism and pragmatism are foes of Christianity. It is less obvious but no less true that Idealism and Christianity are mutually exclusive. Christianity teaches man to worship and serve God the Creator. Idealism, no less than materialism or pragmatism, teaches man to serve and worship the creature. Idealism has a language which resembles that of Christianity but its thought content leads inevitably toward pragmatism. That is the idea expressed in the articles that are herewith reproduced. The relation between Idealism and Christianity has recently become a controversial issue among Reformed Christians. This accounts for the republishing of these articles.

Cornelius Van Til
September, 1955 Philadelphia, Pa.

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God And The Absolute

In many quarters the idea seems to prevail that Idealism and Christianity have found an alliance against all forms of Pragmatism. Both Idealism and Christianity, it is claimed, stand for the maintenance of absolute truth and value while Pragmatism has frankly embraced the relativity of truth and value. Is this presentation correct? I think it is not idealism as well as Pragmatism, it seems to me, has embraced the relativity of truth and value. Idealism as well as Pragmatism is a foe of Biblical Theism. Together they form a secret alliance against Theism. Such will be the contention of this paper.

The method by which we would establish our contention is to show that the God of Idealism is not the God of Theism but is rather the God of Pragmatism. If Idealism and Theism differ radically on the concept of God they are bound to differ radically on religion and morality.

1. Theism And Pragmatism

Why should Theism¹ consider Pragmatism² to be its enemy? Is it because Pragmatism opposes Christian morality? Yes, but there is deeper reason. Is it because Pragmatism is the enemy of the Christian religion? Yes, but for a still deeper reason. Theism considers Pragmatism its foe because Pragmatism serves another God than the God of Theism. Theism serves God; Pragmatism serves gods.

The Pragmatist admits, nay avows, that he serves other gods than the Theist. He likes to speak of "The Obsolescence of the Eternal." He holds that belief in God is due to "miasmatic exhalations of a false intellectualism."

What are these gods of Pragmatism? They are principles of goodness, truth and beauty. Humanity has, in its development, first postulated them and thereupon canonized them. Jesus saw that there are intelligent creative forces at the basis of the Universe. He told us, therefore, that the Father is love.

It is dear that this is the opposite of historic Christianity. Apart from questions of historicity, we may say that for Pragmatism the "ideals" of goodness, truth and beauty exist independently of Christ, while according to Christianity these principles issue from Christ. This distinction one finds to be a never-failing shibboleth. The same shibboleth can serve to distinguish Pragmatism from Theism for the sufficient reason that Christianity is Theism in a world of sin. Christ is God. Principles of value proceed from him because he is God. God is the source of all value as well as its standard. But for Pragmatism value exists independently of God as well as of Christ. More than that, "The purpose of God is the attainment of value in the temporal world."³ The temporal universe is said to be a wider concept than God. God is sometimes said to be "only the ideal

¹ We use the term Theism to signify biblical Theism, of which we take the notion of an absolute, self-sufficient, personal God to be the central metaphysical concept.

² By Pragmatism we signify not only the movement in Philosophy properly so-called, but also all other movements that openly avow the evolution concept as a metaphysical tenet.

³ Wm. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 31.

tendency in things.”⁴ Or he is called, “in the strictest sense not a creator but a creature.”⁵ Theism says that God created the world; Pragmatism says that the world created God.

Thus a metaphysical difference of the first magnitude separates the two. The Pragmatist thinks it quite possible to ask: “Who made God?” Back of God lies mere possibility. Possibility is a wider concept than actuality. God and man both dwell on the island called Reality. This island is surrounded by a shoreless and bottomless ocean of possibility and the rationality that God and we enjoy is born of chance. The Theist thinks it impossible to ask: “Who made God?” God is for him the source of possibility: actuality is a wider concept than possibility. The little island on which we dwell rests upon the ocean of the reality of God; our rationality rests upon the rationality of God. Pragmatism maintains a thorough metaphysical relativism, while Theism will not compromise on the conception of God as a self-conscious absolute personality.

A radical empiricism in epistemology corresponds to the metaphysical relativism of the Pragmatist. No initial assumptions of any kind are to be allowed. The “scientific method” is to be applied to metaphysics. We must be open minded and follow the facts whithersoever they lead us. In searching for the laws of phenomenal life we can never hope to see our efforts crowned with success unless we are strictly neutral. Who knows but God may be a law of phenomenal life. If one holds to metaphysical relativism one must be “neutral.”

This insistence on “neutrality” is highly significant. “Neutrality” in method is not a mere matter of course, a hallmark of ordinary intelligence. It is imposed upon the metaphysical relativist. He cannot choose to be “prejudiced” or “biased”; he must be “neutral.” Therefore he too is “biased” and “prejudiced,” in favor of “neutrality.” “Neutrality” is implied in the supposition of the “open” universe. If the universe is open, the facts new to God and man constantly issue from the womb of possibility. These new facts will constantly reinterpret the meaning of the old. Our method then must be basically synthetic; God’s method is also synthetic. He too must wait to see what the new facts may bring. God can do no more than man. He cannot interpret the meaning of reality to man since he has not yet interpreted reality for himself. Therefore man must interpret for himself and must be neutral; his thought is creatively constructive.

The Theist, on the other hand, cannot be “neutral.” His conception of God makes him “biased.” He holds that for God the facts are in: God knows the end from the beginning. He admits that facts may emerge that are new to man; he knows they are not new to God. History is but the expression of the purpose of God. As far as the space time universe is concerned the category of interpretation precedes that of existence. Man’s interpretation must, therefore, to be correct, correspond to the interpretation of God. Man’s synthesis and analysis rest upon God’s analysis. Strictly speaking, man’s method of investigation is that of analysis of God’s analysis. We are to think God’s thoughts after him; our thought is receptively reconstructive.

Viewed from the side of epistemology the same difference between Pragmatism and Theism appears.

To be “neutral” in method implies metaphysical relativism. This is the simple converse of the statement that metaphysical relativity implies “neutrality.” You cannot be

⁴ Wm. James, *Pluralistic Universe*, p. 124.

⁵ Alexander, *Space Time and Deity*, Vol. 2, p. 399.

“neutral” unless the universe is “open” to God as well as to you. If the facts are all in for God you must accept God’s interpretation. To be “neutral” implies that system is non-existent. To be “neutral” implies that synthesis is prior to analysis for God as well as for man. It implies that God is then within the universe. It is determined beforehand that you cannot come to the acceptance of an absolute God; metaphysical relativity is assumed.

The Theist, on the other hand, because of his “bias” must have an absolute God. If God were not absolute, if for him analysis does not have significance prior to and apart from synthesis, man would have to interpret the facts for himself. Interpretation of reality cannot be a co-operative enterprise between God and man. Co-operation presupposes equal ultimacy. Now, since man is temporally conditioned, his equal ultimacy with God would imply that synthesis is just as basic as analysis for God and man alike. This again implies the “open universe”; and this open universe gives priority to synthesis while a God who must synthesize is no God.

Even if man admits or maintains that he finds the truth and does not make it he is still the final interpreter if God is not. Principles rest in personality. If the principles of goodness, beauty and truth are not considered to be resting in and issuing from the personality of God, they may hover about for a while, as for instance in the case of the Platonic Ideas or Kant’s categorical imperative; but soon they are seen to rest in and issue from finite personality.

Illustrative of the basic difference between Pragmatism and Theism is Pragmatism’s conception of religion. It is, we now expect, a religion without God. Religion is defined as “an emotion resting on a conviction of a harmony between ourselves and the universe at large.”⁶ Again, religion is said to be, “man’s sense of disposition of the Universe to himself.”⁷ Man is not responsible to God but to the universe. Since the universe is impersonal, responsibility returns to man; religion is morality and morality is autonomous.

Thus we see the great gulf fixed between Theism and Pragmatism. It is not always realized that there is no possible middle ground between them. The Pragmatic Christian and the Christian Pragmatist alike are hybrids fore-doomed to sterility; reversion to type constantly takes place: the theistic veneer of Modernism scarcely conceals its pragmatic metaphysics. We are either metaphysical relativists or metaphysical absolutists. If the former, then we are “neutral,” if the latter, then “biased.” Choose ye this day whom ye shall serve! Whom will Idealism serve? Will it stand with Theism or with Pragmatism? Our contention is that it stands with Pragmatism though it tries to hold a midway position.

Before we seek to establish this contention directly we must still further prepare the ground. Thus far we have been looking at Theism and Pragmatism as if they were two figures in repose with the view of comparing a third figure with them. Now we would see the two figures, Theism and Pragmatism, in action, with a view to seeing not only which Idealism resembles most in appearance, but also which it resembles most in behavior. If Pragmatism and Theism are in conflict—they are admitted to be antagonistic—and Idealism does not remain neutral but even sides with Pragmatism, does this not place

⁶ McTaggart, J. E., *Some Dogmas of Religion*, p. 3, 1906.

⁷ Perry, R. B., *The Approach to Philosophy*, p. 66, 1908.

Idealism in a position of enmity against Theism? Allow us then to watch the combat between Theism and Pragmatism.

God does not now settle the dispute between Theism and Pragmatism. The Theist says he may, nay, he will. Through the ages one increasing purpose runs. God's purpose is realized in history and man must be God's willing instrument. This is Christianity: true, but Christianity is Theism in a world of sin. The theist calls upon all men to conform to God's plan. He therefore also calls on the Pragmatist to do so. "I'll wait and see," is the answer of the Pragmatist. "Where do you obtain such knowledge as you say you have? I'll be honestly agnostic, humbly scientific."

Again the Theist urges his case and again the Pragmatist replies: " 'All speculations about an Absolute are but miasmatic exhalations of a false intellectualism which has misconstrued its own nature and powers.' ⁸ Present axioms once were postulates. All that human thought is for is to find our way efficiently from a known fact to an unknown one. No one knows how many are yet to be discovered. No one can tell us that history will terminate in a judgment day. You, my friend, dare not be open-minded."

"Quite true," answers the Theist. "I dare not be open-minded because I cannot be. Have you been open-minded? You have spoken about what cannot be. But to the 'open-minded' all things should be possible. 'Open-mindedness' requires an 'open' universe; and an 'open' universe requires an 'open' mind; your mind is closed against the Absolute. Or was it inconsistency merely? Do you really wish the open universe? Open for the fact of the judgment, that is, for the Absolute? If so then your universe is really a one. To be a genuine relativist you must be a brave absolutist; to be really 'open-minded' you must be 'closed' minded. You were after all quite logical in seeking by one *a priori* 'cannot' to strike God out of your universe. It cannot be done any other way. Only you have failed to observe that an 'open-minded' man must never use 'cannot' as a weapon. An 'open' mind should be 'unstable in all his ways.' "

"Moreover, 'neutrality' seems to be an unreasonable position for a finite, time conditioned man to take. It implies, as we have seen, the open universe, where a new fact may appear at any time. Suppose the 'judgment' should prove to be a fact. Could you meet it 'neutrally'? You could not; since the judgment implies that the facts are now in for God so that you ought to be 'prejudiced.' On the other hand, if it be said that the very meaning of the 'open universe' is that the judgment is not to be a fact, this must be established by *a priori* argument. To be 'neutral' implies the 'open universe'; but no human being can establish the openness of the universe by a neutral method. The assumption of a metaphysical relativism and 'neutrality' would seem to be unreasonable except for one who is absolute, which by admission you are not."

"To be 'neutral' is therefore, to try to be something no human being can be. I see this most clearly when I notice how readily the advocates of Pragmatism turn from a radical empiricism to an extreme form of *a priori* reasoning. They constantly tell me what can and cannot be. They tell me, for example, that the very terms 'relative' and 'absolute' are correlatives so that it is impossible for us to think of God otherwise than a correlative to man. This is but one example of the commonest form in which the assumption that all categories of thinking are the same for God and man is stated. The assumption underlying this is once more that of metaphysical relativism. Only upon the basis of this assumption

⁸ Schiller, F. C., "Axioms as Postulates" in *Personal Idealism*, p. 54. Edited by Sturt.

can you maintain that all categories of thinking are the same for God and man and therefore conclude that the correlativity for us of such terms as 'absolute' and 'relative,' necessarily implies the correlativity of these terms for God. Now metaphysical relativity is just the question at issue; least of all then have your friends who best 'neutrality' a right to assume it. 'Neutrality' must beg the question."

"These considerations have often made me more 'biased' than ever. I feel that it is better to be 'biased' in favor of the Absolute and admit my bias than to be 'biased' against him and deny my bias. I do not close my eyes to difficulties as they center about God's relation to his temporally created world, but I have yet to find a solution of these difficulties that does not begin by dissolving one of the terms to be related, that does not begin by assuming metaphysical relativism. Is it hard to believe in God? It is far harder not to believe in him."

Much more might have been said by the Theist. The Pragmatist however, already admitted the main point, that is, that he has been led to the pragmatic "will to believe" or the will to disbelieve God by the sound of such words as "neutrality," "open-mindedness" and such phrases as "follow the facts wheresoever they lead." These words and phrases he had often heard in university lecture rooms and has actually been led to believe that they have an unlimited application in the field of metaphysics as well as a limited application in the field of science. He now saw that one must either presuppose God or presuppose the open universe.

2. Theism And Idealism

Theism presupposes God and Pragmatism does not. That, we saw, in the last analysis is the difference between them. This difference we considered from two points of view. In metaphysics Theism has an absolute God and temporal creation, while Pragmatism has no absolute God and no temporal creation, but a space-time Universe in which God and man are correlatives. In epistemology Theism avows that man's thought is receptively reconstructive of God's interpretation, while Pragmatism says man is "neutral" and therefore creatively productive in the matter of interpretation.

Where now does Idealism stand? The one question to be asked is: Does Idealism presuppose God? If it does it is theistic; if it does not it is pragmatic. The question may be conveniently studied by regarding it in turn from the point of view of metaphysics and that of epistemology. We shall ask (a) whether Idealism assumes a relativistic metaphysics and (b) whether Idealism wants to be "neutral" in its epistemology. If we find that such is the case we are driven to the conclusion that Idealism will take sides with Pragmatism in its combat with Theism as described above.

A simple dichotomous division will be all we need. The differences between Idealism and Pragmatism may still be many and great even though we must conclude that neither is theistic. We have no desire to remove these differences.

The necessity of a simple alternative is nowhere greater than in cases of doubt. If such an alternative is available we should use it. Idealism is the case of doubt. It might be hard to determine whether or not it is theistic. Pragmatism has, however, simplified the matter for us. If Pragmatism were not with us it would have behooved us to invent it.

Even with the aid of the simple alternative now at hand the question is not easily settled. If you have watched the face of the Idealist when he beheld the struggle between

the Theist and the Pragmatist you will have noted what seemed to be hesitation or even sudden reversals of purpose on the part of the Idealist. Sometimes it seemed as though the Idealist would unequivocally take sides with the Theist. Then again the Theist drew such merciless conclusions on the matter of “neutrality” that the Idealist seemed to think he ought to change his allegiance in order to save Pragmatism at least as a buffer state.

On the whole the Idealist when asked in court: “Have you or have you not presupposed God?” answers: “I have.” But that does not exclude cross-questioning. Perhaps the Idealist thus readily avows his alliance with the Theist because of an undiscovered ambiguity in his thinking. Perhaps the Idealist thinks it possible to presuppose God with the Theist and be “neutral” with the Pragmatist. Or perchance, though seeing that such would be impossible, the Idealist may be “neutral” in spite of himself; as without one’s knowledge cancer may be doing its certain work from within.

Of an organism it need not be shown that all parts are affected with a fatal disease. Especially in the case of the intricate spiritual organism of knowledge, the finding of one pathological area warrants sanatorium treatment of the patient.

Again, in the debate about God the Theist takes the affirmative and the Pragmatist the negative. To win the debate Pragmatism need find but one weak spot in the argument of the affirmative. The main point of the Theist may be attacked in any of the corollaries that issue from it. On the other hand if any of the corollaries of the Theistic conception of God are attacked the conception of God is also attacked. If we find then that Idealism sides with Pragmatism on any one point the Theist can no longer consider the Idealist his ally.

The Idealist has not presupposed his Absolute, and therefore his Absolute is or tends to become the God of the Pragmatist. Such is our main contention. The Idealist has recognized the necessity of presupposing the Absolute but has not been able to do so because of the “neutrality” involved in his logic. As in the case of the Pragmatist “neutrality” leads the Idealist to and is itself an evidence of his metaphysical relativism.

First, then, we would note that the Idealist definitely sides with the Theist against the Pragmatist according to his own statements. The Idealist has been very insistent against the Pragmatist on the necessity of presupposing an Absolute. Many mediating theologians were led to believe that Christianity must look to Idealism for a genuine metaphysical defense for its position. The Idealist would not come one whit behind the chiefest apostle of Theism in his protestation that God is absolute.

The Idealist even uses interchangeably the terms “Absolute” and “God.” The Idealist says not only that he presupposes the Absolute, but that the Absolute is God. Thus the Idealist’s claim that his Absolute is the God of Theism looks very plausible. It is this plausibility, we believe, that led many to a hasty identification of the Absolute with God.⁹ This plausibility we must account for. We shall do so by examining the thought of recent representatives of Idealist philosophy.

“Appearance and Reality” is the title of F. H. Bradley’s masterpiece of metaphysics. The title indicates that which the contents of the book seeks to substantiate, namely, that “Appearance” is riddled with contradictions while in “Reality” these contradictions are “somehow” to be neutralized or harmonized. Reality is accordingly thought of as “beyond” appearance.

⁹ By “God” we signify the God of Theism unless otherwise stated.

The supposition of Bradley's philosophy is that the real is the rational. Lack of rationality in Appearance reduces its reality to a minimum. Comprehensive rationality makes Reality real. Rationality, that is, complete, comprehensive rationality must "somehow" be the everlasting arms underneath Appearance or Appearance would not even appear. Appearance would be reduced not only to a minimum, but to zero, unless complete rationality were underneath.

The similarity of Bradley's position to that of Theism is striking. Both demand complete rationality somewhere. Bradley seeks it in the Absolute; Theism seeks it in God. Together they maintain that on the Pragmatic basis our experience would be meaningless. Bradley seems to be even more insistent on the common demand of complete rationality than is Theism. He claims that any reality to be real must be completely rational, that is, perspicuous to itself. Theism demands no more than that God shall be completely comprehensible to himself. Bradley has exactly the same demand for Appearance that he has for Reality; Theism has a higher demand for God than for man. For Bradley Appearance is unreal because not comprehensible: for Theism Appearance is real not because comprehensible or incomprehensible to us, but because it is the expression of a comprehension of God. The soul of the difference is that Bradley speaks of comprehensibility per se while Theism distinguishes between comprehensibility for God and comprehensibility for man. Bradley has assumed that all thought must be measured by one standard, that all thought, human and divine, is of one type.

The *fons et origo* of the difference between Idealism and Theism is therewith discovered. From the Theistic standpoint this assumption of the unity of type of all thought is the cancer working its deadly work in the Idealistic organism. It is the sin of Eve: she thought that she might be like God; so she became "neutral" between God and the devil. From the Idealistic standpoint the rejection on the part of Theism of this assumption leads it inevitably to, or is itself an expression of, a metaphysical dualism. Idealism insists that the assumption must be made in order that the necessary unity within which all diversities are to play may be at hand. Such unity must be presupposed or it cannot be found at all.

Waiving now the question, who is in the right, we call attention to the impassable gulf between these two types of epistemology. No harmony between the two is possible. One must choose between them. This will appear more definitely as we advance.

The difference in metaphysics corresponds to the difference in epistemology. From the idealistic assumption that all thought is of one type it follows that the Universe is a wider concept than "God." It is the Universe in the case of Bradley as in the case of other Idealists, that is really the Absolute. "God" and man operate within this Universe. They are aspects of this Universe, correlatives one of the other. They are really equally ultimate aspects, or they could not be aspects of one Reality at all.

It may not immediately appear that this metaphysics of Bradley leads one toward the relativism of Pragmatism. However, let us at this stage keep in mind two things. In the first place that in Bradley's metaphysics man is a charter member of the Universe. This implies not only that plurality is for Bradley as basic as is unity—to which, if applied to the Trinity, the Theist will agree—but that the conditions to which man is subject will influence Reality as a whole. Reality becomes the one subject to which all predicates must apply in the same way. Secondly, a corollary derived from the first point is that time must be real for God in the same sense that it is real for man. If time is unreal for God it

must be proved that the Absolute or Universe as a whole is non- or supra-temporal. On the other hand if it should not be possible to prove the unreality of time for man, it will be equally impossible to maintain the supra-temporal nature of God. A basic metaphysical pluralism is involved in Bradley's epistemology which, we believe, can furnish the unity that he thinks it furnishes. And this basic pluralism, because it has man as a charter member, must become a pluralism in flux.

Add to this the observation that the idealistic assumption in epistemology that man's thought is on the par with God's is the "neutrality" of Pragmatism since it seeks to make the interpretation of reality a co-operative enterprise between God and man which implies that man ultimately interprets reality for himself,¹⁰ and we already see "neutrality" chasing "relativity" as a dog chases its tail.

Bradley seems to have felt something of the difficulties involved in his position. He ends up one argument after another with an appeal to mystery. "Somehow" Reality will absorb all the difficulties of Appearance. His Reality becomes much of a Moloch, requiring the sacrifices of the Appearance. There is in Bradley an acosmic strain. But the Theist fears this acosmic strain; to him it is an evidence of a false a priorism that says man cannot be man unless he is God. A Moloch demanding human sacrifice is an idol; by that token can one know it. Moreover Idealism has no right to appeal to mystery. One who assumes that the Real is the Rational and at the same time makes man a charter member with "God" in the Universe cannot, without destroying his basic principle, appeal to mystery. There may be, on idealistic basis, a sphere of the unknown to man, but never one of the unknowable. By this token too is Idealism distinguished from Theism. Theism says there is nothing unknown or unknowable for God, but there is for man one territory unknown but knowable and another unknown and also unknowable. If it were not so man would be one with God. Thus if Theism appeals to mystery it appeals to the ultimate rationality as it is in God. Theism does not, as does Idealism, by its appeal to mystery neutralize its basic demand that there must be an ultimate rationality back of our experience.

We may now distinguish between Absolute Number One called "God" as "Beyond," and Absolute Number Two as the Universe or the Whole. Both concepts are used by Bradley and by Idealists in general with much ambiguity. Absolute Number Two, we believe, fits into the scheme of Idealistic logic, while Absolute Number One is the product of an acosmic strain unnatural to and subversive of the demand that reality must be essentially perspicuous to man as well as to God.

More clearly will this be seen in the philosophy of Bernard Bosanquet. We meet first of all with the same demand for complete rationality lest there be no reality at all. We meet also with the same appeal to Absolute Number One in which this rationality may be found because if we seek within our inmost personality the reply comes back; Rationality, comprehensive rationality is not found with me. The same disappointment also, but a disappointment now expected, meets us when we find that it is Absolute Number Two, the Universe that really has the love of his heart. The reason for this is the same as it was in Bradley's case, namely the "neutrality" in the assumption that God's thought is subject to the same limitations as ours.

¹⁰ *Vide* discussion in previous pages on the differences between Pragmatism and Theism.

Bosanquet abhors the open universe of Pragmatism. He feels certain that if we begin with a plurality of independently existing atoms we will never have coherence in experience at all. The very nature of the Judgment as we employ it in scientific investigation implies that unity underlies all difference.¹¹ Take, for example, any object of empirical research: “Why do some animals change color?” You at once ask a biologist for possible alternative solutions. You recognize that there is a biological world into which the incident must fit. The biological world in turn is related to other worlds, such as those of logic, aesthetics and ethics. We find then that in beginning with a given complex of experience whose consequences we desire to consider, the character of the whole of reality has to be respected and maintained. “Thus it follows from the nature of implication that every inference involves a judgment based upon the whole of reality, though referring only to a partial system which need not even be actual.”¹² “Judgment is the reference of a significant idea to a subject in Reality by means of an identity of content between them.”¹³

Moreover we cannot disregard this nature of the judgment without denying ourselves. You are nobody but for the universe that forms your atmosphere. Without the universe you operate in a vacuum in which no organism can long endure. Without the Universe you would disintegrate upward and downward, forward and backward, to the left and to the right. Without this universe the law of contradiction, not as an abstract principle, but in the sense that things cannot exist in an infinity of ways, at once would have to go, “and so the conception of determinate experience would have to be, though it cannot be, abandoned.”¹⁴

Pluralism destroys the possibility of knowledge. Such is Bosanquet’s contention. Such is also Theism’s contention. Both maintain that unity must be basic to difference.

Naturally, if Bosanquet opposes a pluralist universe in general, he will also oppose Pluralism in flux. Pragmatism contends or assumes that time is a constituent ingredient of the universe. The Space-Time continuum is the matrix from which all things human and divine proceed. This, we have contended, is the contradictory opposite of Theism. Either the Space-Time continuum “creates” God or God creates the Space-Time continuum. Between these two Bosanquet has seemingly chosen to stand with Theism.

Bosanquet recognizes that fact that if the Space-Time is to be the matrix of all experience the unity which knowledge needs cannot be obtained. “If the basis of the universe were changeable the basis of our argument whatever it might be, would vanish with the stability of the whole.”¹⁵

There, as elsewhere, Bosanquet clearly demands that actuality must be prior to potentiality. Most incisive and completely comprehensive is this alternative. If the Universe, including gods and men, is basically temporal then bare potentiality is raised to the highest possible metaphysical status. Our thinking will then be compelled to rest in an infinite regress or a complete void. Our little island of rationality would then rest upon an ocean of irrationality and would therewith itself be irrational. The least bit of our rational

¹¹ *Implication and Linear Inference*, p. 4.

¹² *Implications and Linear Inference*, p. 4.

¹³ *Essentials of Logic*, p. 70.

¹⁴ *Implication*, p. 159.

¹⁵ *Meeting of Extremes*, p. 191.

experience presupposes the rationality of “the basis of the universe,” and the rationality is gone if the “basis of the universe” is subject to change. On this point Bosanquet and Theism agree.

We have said that our experience “presupposes” God. Even here the agreement between Bosanquet and Theism seems to continue. Both would employ the transcendental method. It is very easy to find difficulties for thought if the method of formal logic be applied to any position in metaphysics; witness the “Appearance,” of Bradley. So it is quite easy to point to what seem to be outrages to our reason in the conception of a God creating a temporal universe. But if it be found that any alternative to this position leads us to an annihilation of rationality itself it may still be reasonable to presuppose God’s existence. Thus the Theist holds. Similarly Bosanquet reasons for the necessity of a timeless Absolute.

The “basis of the universe” must be timeless; that basis we may call the Absolute or God. Thus we may speak of God as beyond or above the changing world. A God beyond the changing world, Bosanquet feels, we need lest our rationality disappear entirely. He criticizes Italian Idealism by saying that it has substituted for the true insight: “If God is not then I am nothing,” the other statement—“If God is then I am not.”¹⁶ “The reason,” he continues, “as I have explained elsewhere, I believe to lie in the equation of thought with thinking and of thinking with reality, which is another aspect of the rejection of all transcendence.”¹⁷ Without the Absolute as a Beyond our experience would be meaningless. At this point the similarity between Bosanquet and Theism would seem to intensify into identity; the Samaritans avowed allegiance to the God of Jerusalem.

Moreover Bosanquet’s zeal for the Beyond far outruns that of Theism for God. At least so it seems. Like Bradley, Bosanquet demands human sacrifices for the Absolute. He tells us that no categories from our temporal experience, such as teleology or purpose can have meaning for the Absolute. In the case of the Absolute we can speak of value but not of purpose.¹⁸ More pointedly this same thought appeared in the symposium held before the Aristotelian Society on the subject whether individuals have substantive or objectival existence. Pringle-Pattison charged Bosanquet with making of men “in ultimate analysis connections of content within the real individual to which they belong.” There is a determination in Bosanquet, says Pringle-Pattison, “to reach a formal identity by abstracting from differences on which the very character of the universe as a spiritual cosmos depends.”¹⁹

I have omitted nothing of value to anyone interested in establishing the identity between God and the Absolute of Bosanquet. We have allowed the defense to exhaust itself. All the evidence is in. We feel relieved now, not because we shall have to maintain that the Absolute is not God, but because if we do so justly in this instance we do so justly everywhere. We may begin our criticism of Bosanquet by saying that the defense has proved too much. There may be too great a zeal for the Absolute. The God of Theism demands no human sacrifice; if the Absolute does, he is not God. The “Appearance” of Bradley was sacrificed to his “Reality” because he applied to them the same test of

¹⁶ *Meeting of Extremes*, p. 70.

¹⁷ *Meeting of Extremes*, p. 70.

¹⁸ *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, Lect. 4, pp. 122 f, London.

¹⁹ *Proceedings Aristotelian Society*, N.S., 1917–1918, pp. 522 f.

comprehensive consistency. And this similarity of test was simply assumed; all thought was assumed to be of one type. Similarly with Bosanquet. The acosmic tendency in his thinking which demands that human beings be considered “connections of content” or “loci” of the Absolute is pantheistic, not theistic. And more important still the reason for Bosanquet’s acosmism is the assumption of the identity of the nature of human and divine thought. The Absolute cannot think in terms of purpose since purpose is a temporally conditioned category. This sounds theistic. But when it is added that our thought, to be genuine, must be like God’s thought, beyond time, the Pantheism is apparent. It seems as though we are exalting “God” very highly when we say that his thoughts are not temporally conditioned, but when we add that our thoughts also are not temporally conditioned the exaltation of “God” is neutralized. Not only that, we meet here the same contradiction that we noted in Bradley’s thought. The appeal to the Absolute is an appeal to “mystery,” the existence of which is denied by the idealistic demand that Reality be perspicuous to thought *per se*, human as well as divine. Absolute Number One, the fruit of Idealism’s acosmic strain is unnatural to and would, if taken seriously, be subversive of idealistic logic itself. Moloch was an idol because of his demand of human sacrifice; even Absolute Number One, is not the God of Theism.

There where Bosanquet most clearly resembled Theism, his position is nevertheless the exact opposite of Theism. Thus ran our argument. Even the Absolute as Beyond is not the God of Theism. What then shall we say if we further observe that Bosanquet actually served Absolute Number Two more faithfully than Absolute Number One? That such must be the case we saw to be already involved in the fact that Absolute Number One is an unnatural growth, in the organism of Idealism. That such must be the case we also expect since Absolute Number One contradicts the basic demand of Idealism that reality be essentially perspicuous to man.

That Bosanquet actually does what the logic of his position demands we must now seek to establish. Bosanquet speaks much of the Concrete Universal. The unity that is to underly our experience is not to be independent or exclusive of diversities. Against Pluralism and Pragmatism Bosanquet has contended that unity must be as fundamental as diversity. If one begins with a plurality, and thereupon attempts to get unity into this plurality, the unity will be abstract and functionless. On the other hand Bosanquet asserts that the unity will be equally abstract and functionless if diversity is not as fundamental as unity itself. Would this *per se* make his thought anti-theistic? Not necessarily. Theism may also say that diversity is as basic as unity. Theism may contend that the Trinity is not a burdensome encumbrance to a theology already heavily loaded with irrationalities but the very foundation of rational thought. Formally the Theist and Bosanquet agree, but materially they differ. Bosanquet seeks for his diversity not within Absolute Number One, but within Absolute Number Two, the Universe. Man is again a charter member of the Universe and furnishes part of the original diversity. The Concrete Universal is constantly referred to as the final subject of all predication. What is said of man is said of the Universe inclusive of “God.”

Again, Bosanquet has constantly affirmed that actuality must be prior to potentiality and therefore analysis to synthesis. For this reason he found it necessary to find a timeless Absolute. But equally insistent is Bosanquet in holding that synthesis is as fundamental as analysis. By his theory of implication he would avoid the false *a priori* of Rationalism as well as the false *a posteriori* of Pragmatism, both of which he calls “linear inference.”

“Implication” seeks to follow an evolving system. With this attempt Bosanquet tried to do the impossible. His was a search for a self-generating *a priori*; the search seems as hopeful as that for the Holy Grail. We may dislike “either-or” alternatives, but here we must face one: your *a priori* is either in the timeless self-conscious God with the result that history realizes the purpose of God, or your *a priori* is to develop in a Universe inclusive of God, with the result that history is self-dependent.

We shall soon see this aspect of Idealism run into an open avowal of Pluralism in the case of McTaggart and Pringle-Pattison. Suffice it here to have pointed out that a metaphysical Pluralism is embedded in the heart of Bosanquet’s logic. There seems to be no escape from the consequence that “God” must be (a) one of the members of the pluralistic universe in which case he is finite, or (b) the universal nature within the members of the Pluralism in which case this transcendence has disappeared, or (c) the combination of these in which case God is identified with the Universe or Whole, so that there is no more need of speaking of “God” at all. The first road is not open to Bosanquet, since he has constantly opposed the idea of a finite God. The second road is not open to Bosanquet since he has invented the concrete universal for the very purpose of slaying the abstract universal. The third road is that constantly followed; it is the very road of the Concrete Universal. The Absolute is the Universe inclusive of “God” and man. “God” is thus to be an element in this Concrete Universal; the element of unity or universality. Man is also to be an element, the element of diversity. The eye cannot say that it hath no need of hearing; “God” cannot say that he hath no need of man, they are members of one organism.

This basic Pluralism tends to become Pluralism in flux. Bosanquet has constantly affirmed that actuality must be prior to potentiality and therefore analysis prior to synthesis. For this reason he found it necessary to hold to a timeless Absolute. Only for a timeless Absolute would all the facts be in. Here his thought seemed to be thoroughly theistic. Yet we saw that when Bosanquet was inclined to take this idea of a timeless Absolute seriously he demanded that all thought be supratemporal. Even on this basis then it was the Universe inclusive of God and man that was thought of as timeless. The Universe is the ultimate subject of all predication; it is either wholly timeless or wholly temporal. Now, however, this same Universe tends to become wholly temporal instead of wholly timeless. Insistent as Bosanquet was that analysis be as fundamental as synthesis he was equally insistent that synthesis be as fundamental as analysis. By “implication” Bosanquet would seek to avoid the “linear inference” of deductive as well as of inductive reasoning. Seven plus five is an ‘eternal’ novelty. It is also an eternal ‘novelty.’ “Implication” would follow an evolving system. Bosanquet sought for a genuine *a priori*, for a self-generating one. The possible must be as fundamental as the actual.

What becomes of “God” in this self-developing system? He is one of three things: (a) a developing member within the Whole, or (b) the generating *a priori* within the Whole, or (c) the Whole itself. “God” cannot be (a) because Bosanquet has constantly opposed the idea of a finite developing deity. “God” cannot be (b) since he would again be but an abstract principle within a developing whole. “God” must be the self-developing Whole. Only it may well be questioned whether “God” can be a self-developing Whole. Does not this controvert the basic demand of Idealism that the actual precede the potential? Bosanquet’s great desire for inclusiveness has led him to compromise his principle. One cannot have his cake and eat it. The unity for which he seeks, which he says we must

even presuppose, turns out to be merely a member of the plurality, or an abstract principle within it, or thirdly the Whole plurality itself and all these in flux. By this attempt to make the possible as fundamental as the actual and synthesis as fundamental as analysis for “all possible experience” Bosanquet has embraced the Pragmatic principle and is wedded to the apotheosis of the possible.

Thus the Absolute is defined as “the high-water mark of fluctuations in experience of which, in general, we are daily and normally aware,” and Reality is said to be “essentially synthetic.”

Our conclusion is that Bosanquet has tried to serve two masters. As a great logician he saw that a temporal plurality, or the open universe, cannot account for our knowledge; the “neutrality” that is the invariable concomitant of metaphysical relativism is but an apotheosis of negation operating in a vacuum. But when he assumed without question the identity of the nature of “all possible experience,” when he made synthesis as fundamental as analysis, and the possible as fundamental as the actual, he took the “ultimacy,” the underived character of time for granted and with it the Universe as a wider concept than God. He tried to be “neutral,” after all. Reality is that which thought, that is, our thought operating on experience finds it to be. After this assumption of the Universe as the subject of all predication God could not be presupposed. Bosanquet desperately seeks for a God within the Universe and therefore could not presuppose him beyond the Universe.

We may state our conclusion differently by regarding it from the point of view of interpretation. We saw in our discussion of Pragmatism that interpretation must originate with God if God is genuinely presupposed. Human thought is then receptively reconstructive. Deny this receptivity of human thought and you cannot presuppose God. Bosanquet has denied the receptively constructive character of human thought and therefore is wedded to a metaphysical relativism.

That Bosanquet has denied the receptively reconstructive nature of human thought is implied in his assumption that “all possible experience” is subject to the laws of thought in the same way. God and man are then to interpret the Universe together so that God does not have the initiative. Further, since Reality is sometimes said to be “essentially synthetic,” the whole system grows. The end is not known to the Absolute from the beginning since the Absolute himself has to wait for the facts to come in. In such a case there is no complete actuality at the basis of possibility.

Bosanquet’s logic may be said to be one of the finest expressions of the Coherence theory of truth. We can only touch on this important point. Let it suffice to recall that the Coherence theory of truth as maintained by the Hegelian tradition implies the essential perspicuity of the Universe to the mind of man as well as to the mind of God, since the statement that the real is the rational and the rational is the real is applied to the Universe of God and man. Add to this that the Coherence theory of truth is the logical development of Kant’s view of the essential creativeness of human thought and the contrast between the epistemology of Bosanquet and that of Theism is seen to be as great as it could be. All of Kant’s objections to the “theistic arguments” have done little damage to Theism in comparison with the conception of the creativity of human thought. Creativity implies autonomy. Kant carried out this idea in the field of morals; Hegel consistently applied it to all of reality. The creativity view of thought in epistemology is the source of

“neutrality” and metaphysical relativity. Ruggiero²⁰ has beautifully shown that the extreme immanentism of Gentile and Croce was but the logical development of Kant’s creativity theory. Italian Idealism, moreover, is a twin sister to Pragmatism.

Our interpretation of Bosanquet on this point and on the whole matter is corroborated by J. Watson. It is Watson’s contention that inasmuch as Bosanquet has never openly denied and all the while positively implied that our knowledge is absolute, not in the sense of comprehensive but in principle, he has no right to an Absolute as a Beyond in any sense. Watson holds very definitely that the idealistic theory of judgment implies the essential perspicuity of Reality to the mind of man. Thus Absolute Number One would be a false growth on the basis of idealistic logic. More than that, the Beyond would be entirely destructive of idealistic logic since the Beyond sets a limit to the perspicuity to human thought.²¹

A similar criticism is made by M. C. Carroll. He says that Bosanquet “failed to disclaim that there is any real sense in which we can speak of an absolute subject.”²² The point of Mr. Carroll is that since we are “adjectives,” “loci,” or aspects of the Whole the Absolute can be no more. Together we form the convex and the concave sides of the same disc.

Bosanquet represents the high-water mark of recent idealistic thought. He has worked out the implications of idealistic logic more fully than anyone else. In his Logic he has clearly shown that the unrelated pluralistic universe of Pragmatism as it corresponds to and is the necessary correlative of the so-called “scientific,” “open-minded,” “neutral” method of research is destructive of knowledge itself. God is a fact that must be presupposed or he cannot be harmonized with other facts. Accordingly Neutrality is impossible. But if “neutrality” be still adhered to, God is denied and with him the rationality which we need as much as breath. “Neutrality” we saw to be inherent in the heart of Bosanquet’s essential creativity theory of thought by virtue of which he constantly speaks of laws that hold for “all possible experience.” The result has been that Bosanquet has forsaken the transcendental method, returned to the false a priorism imbedded in every “scientific method,” when it determines what is possible and impossible. What was actually proved impossible on this assumption of the essential unity of human and divine thought is the presupposition of God.

We are not directly interested now in defending Theism against Bosanquet’s position. Incidentally it appears that if Bosanquet’s logic is sound it tells against himself and in favor of Theism. The burden of his argument is that our knowledge or experience in general needs to presuppose system and this can be presupposed in the Absolute only. Now we found that the Absolute of Bosanquet is not absolute but is after all an aspect of a self-developing whole. Our main purpose was to prove that the “Absolute” is not God. We could do this no more effectively than by indicating the formal similarity of arguments employed against Pragmatism by both Bosanquet and Theism and at the same

²⁰ *Modern Philosophy*, G. de Ruggiero. Tr. by A. H. Hannay and R. C. Collingwood. London, 1921.

²¹ *Phil. Rev.*, v. 4, 1895, pp. 353 ff; pp. 486 ff, and *Phil. Rev.*, v. 34, pp. 440.

²² *Phil. Rev.*, v. 31, 1921. Article, “The Nature of the Absolute in the Metaphysics of B. Bosanquet,” p. 178.

time their radical difference; Bosanquet and Dewey are allies; their motto is: Theism must be destroyed.

In our criticism of Bosanquet we saw that as the result of his view of the inherent creativity of thought the Absolute which he feels he needs will have to respect (a) an ultimate plurality, (b) a plurality in flux, that is, self-developing Universe, and therefore (c) the final interpretation of experience by man. Has subsequent history justified our criticism?

In seeking to answer this question we limit ourselves to a discussion of a few representative Idealists. Our contention is that recent exponents of Idealism have themselves felt the ambiguity in Bosanquet's position. They are frankly denying transcendence and embracing immanence.

We may begin with the philosophy of McTaggart. McTaggart has keenly felt that Idealism must do either of two things: it must admit a temporalism in metaphysics or it must deny the reality of time. For, and this is highly significant, McTaggart simply assumes that the Absolute of Idealism is Absolute Number Two, that is, the Universe inclusive of God and Man.

The demand of Bosanquet's logic that the Universe is the subject of all predication is rigidly carried through by McTaggart. Hence he no longer seeks for a timeless basis of the universe. That would involve the application of two contradictory predicates to the same subject. For him the Universe is either wholly temporal or wholly non-temporal.

The Universe is non-temporal. Time is an illusion. Such is McTaggart's position.²³ Only a timeless reality is complete and therefore furnishes the system necessary to thought. We might develop a criticism here that to prove the unreality of time, be it objective, subjective or merely as an illusion, is highly artificial. We might add that McTaggart has not proved the unreality of time and is therefore seeking to interpret one ultimate in terms of another ultimate. We pass these criticisms by to observe that granted McTaggart has proved his case even so the Absolute is in no sense Beyond. The reason for this is that McTaggart has insisted on the metaphysical ultimacy of plurality. To be sure he still maintains that unity is as fundamental as plurality, but the only unity that can be maintained consistent with an equally fundamental plurality is that of a universal, expressing itself in particulars. As human nature reveals itself in various human persons and may be said with respect to any one person to be largely beyond him so the Absolute is the universal manifesting itself in particulars though largely beyond any one particular. If anywhere, it is in this rarefied acosmic atmosphere that the Absolute as Beyond is seen to be entirely inconsistent with idealistic logic. The principle of Bosanquet that diversity must be as fundamental as unity while this diversity is assumed to be expressed in humanity, has been consistently carried out by McTaggart. Thereupon the Beyond is seen no more.

Pringle-Pattison tells us the same story. In his book, *Hegelianism and Personality*, he sounded the bugle call for opposition against the aggressiveness of the Absolute. He spoke of the "imperviousness" of the finite individual. And though he later modified this phrase in his argument with Bosanquet on the subject whether individuals have substantive or adjectival existence he still maintains that the individual seems "the only

²³ McTaggart, J. E., *Mind*, N.S. 524, p. 326, in articles on "Time and the Hegelian Dialectic."

conceivable goal of divine endeavour.” When Bosanquet criticizes his view of individuals as being “members” within the Absolute Pringle-Pattison replies that Bosanquet in turn should recognize “the significance of numerical identity as the basal characteristic of concrete existence.”²⁴ In themselves these individuals are no doubt abstractions, but so is the Absolute by itself an abstraction. Pringle-Pattison was quite right in appealing to Bosanquet’s basic position that diversity in the Universe is as basic as unity to oppose Bosanquet’s inconsistent insistence upon the Absolute’s priority in any sense.

In this splendid book on “The Idea of God in Modern Philosophy,” Pringle-Pattison tells us that in his first series of lectures he seeks to establish the existence of so-called “appearance.” In this first series he has little or no need of the category of the Absolute. He tells us this in answer to a criticism on his views of Rashdall. This confession corresponds exactly with our criticism; The absolute is for Pringle-Pattison a late arrival. History has justified our criticism of Bosanquet; pluralism has come forth out of the best idealistic logic.

Pluralism soon becomes Pluralism in flux or avowed temporalism. His argument for the unreality of time is unconvincing. But more than that, the pressure of idealistic logic opposes it. If synthesis is to be as fundamental as analysis and the *a posteriori* is to be wedded to the *a priori* for God and man alike, time is real. It is, whatever else, it is underived, an inherent ingredient in the Universe, even the source of plurality or diversity. Seven plus five are twelve is to be ‘eternal’ novelty, but also an eternal ‘novelty.’ The individuals to whom in the case of McTaggart and Pringle-Pattison membership is accorded in Ultimate Reality are temporally conditioned.

In the philosophy of Pringle-Pattison this temporalism begins to show itself. In his thinking the Absolute has arisen in the East and died in the West; from being the presupposition of possible experience the Absolute has become the logical universal of many particulars, and then submerged as a vague stability within a developing whole from which he finally comes forth—though not altogether comely because of the disfiguring detritus of the Space-Time continuum—as the Ideal of humanity. “The presence of the Ideal is the reality of God within us.”²⁵

J. Watson, more outspokenly than Pringle-Pattison, rejects Bosanquet’s non-temporal Beyond as inconsistent with Idealistic logic. He thinks it is the natural outcome of the principle of idealistic logic that there be no Beyond at all. He thinks that the very nature of all thoughts must be temporal. Reality, says he, in its completeness must be a thinkable reality; the real is the rational. Reality must be essentially perspicuous to the mind of man. Hence it will not do to separate the “what” from the “that” too sharply as Bradley has done. There can be no Absolute that is incomprehensible for us; the Absolute must be within the Universe. And since we are temporally conditioned beings reality in its broadest sense “is not for us stationary, but grows in content as thought, which is the faculty of unifying the distinguishable elements of reality, develops in the process by

²⁴ *Proceedings Aristotelian Society*, 1917, 1918, p. 512.

²⁵ *Idea of God*, p. 246; also *Mind*, 1919, the note in which he replies to a criticism of this statement by H. Rashdall. He says: “The Ideal is precisely the most real thing in the world,” and therewith thinks he maintains “trans-finite reality.” But this does not effect the course of our argument.

which those elements are more fully distinguished and unified.”²⁶ The self-generating *a priori* inherent in the creativity view of idealistic logic is here boldly leaving the timeless basis of the Universe with the purpose never to return.

A frank acceptance of temporalism in metaphysics, Watson tells us, is not only the logical outcome of idealistic logic, but is also the only safeguard against agnosticism. Hegel and some of his followers still asked the question why the Absolute should reveal himself, assuming that he was beyond. Watson, on the other hand tells us that: “If it is asked why the Absolute reveals itself gradually in the finite, I should answer that the question is absurd: we cannot go beyond reality in order to explain why it is what it is; we can only state what its nature, as known to us, involves.”²⁷ What the Theist asserts of God, that is, that it cannot be asked who made him, Watson asserts of temporal reality. In other words, the Space-Time continuum is frankly accepted as the matrix of God. Metaphysically we are coming very close to the position maintained by S. Alexander in “Space, Time and Deity.” All reality “implies succession, and hence we must say that there is no conceivable reality which does not present the aspect of succession or process.”²⁸

It is this emphasis on time and succession as an inseparable aspect of the whole of reality that leads Idealism far away from Theism and very close to Pragmatism. To be sure there remains a difference which we have not the least interest to obliterate. The chief difference seems to be that in spite of the metaphysical relativism which Idealism has in common with Pragmatism, Idealism continues to maintain that Reality or Actuality must be the source of possibility. A. E. Taylor puts the alternative clearly: “either accept the priority of the actual to the potential or be ready to assert that you can conceive of the possible non-existence of any reality whatsoever.”²⁹

Watson himself asserts that the least bit of experience presupposes complete rationality. We would, says he, not be able to ask any question about the Absolute or about anything else if the Absolute were not the source of our ability. On the contrary Pragmatism frankly accepts the position that it is possible to ask whence Reality came. Idealism continues to demand an Absolute. Our only point is that Idealism cannot satisfy its own demand. Its logic involves temporalism or metaphysical relativism and temporalism is the apotheosis of bare possibility. Pragmatism is on this point consistent and consistency wins out; Idealism is fraternizing with Pragmatism. History has justified our criticism of Bosanquet; Pluralism has become Pluralism in flux.

In distinguishing between Pragmatism and Theism we maintained that the difference when viewed from the standpoint of interpretation is that according to Theism God has made the facts and therefore interprets them while according to Pragmatism the facts are not made by God and therefore not interpreted by him. We saw further, when criticizing Bosanquet’s view on this matter, that he sides with the Pragmatist in this issue because his creativity view of thought could lead to nothing else.

Has history also justified this criticism? We believe it has, Idealist writers very frankly decide for man against God. On questions of morality this is especially apparent.

²⁶ *Phil. Rev.*, v. 4, 1895, p. 360.

²⁷ *Phil. Rev.*, v. 4, 1895, p. 367.

²⁸ *Phil. Rev.*, v. 4, 1895, p. 497.

²⁹ Hastings, E. R. E., “Theism,” p. 278.

To whom is man responsible? “To God who is the source and standard of good,” says the Theist: “to man who is the source and standard of good,” says the Pragmatist. What answer does the Idealist give?

The Idealist answers that man is responsible to the law of goodness. If we put the alternative whether the good is good in itself and therefore God wants it or whether the good is good because God wants it, that is, that the good is expressive of his nature, Idealism chooses unequivocally for the former, while Theism chooses unequivocally for the latter. Idealism follows Plato while Theism follows St. Augustine. The distinction is basic. The former position implies that the universe is a wider concept than God. And in this universe God and man are correlatives; they have equal interpretative powers. Each is finally to determine for himself whether the other is engaged in offensive warfare.

Such we see to be the case even for such men as J. Lindsay³⁰ and H. Rashdall.³¹ To these men it seems impossible to come to anything but a Pantheism on the basis of Bosanquet’s thinking. Lindsay wants a free and non-necessary relation of God to the world. Rashdall insists that God created the world by the power of his will. Once insert the term will into your conception of God’s relation to the world, thinks Rashdall, and you have freed yourself from pantheistic thought.

If these conceptions were carried through we should expect that God would definitely be exalted as the final interpretative category of our experience. However, with all of Lindsay’s insistence on a free relation of God to the world he tells us definitely that he does not want a God who is “cosmically independent.” The Universe is still a wider concept than God and therewith man is relieved of responsibility to God. Similarly for Rashdall the will of God is strictly conditioned throughout by law which is above God and operates in a cosmos without which God could not exist. God wills for the best in an independent situation; possibility is greater than God. When the critical juncture arrives so that Rashdall must tell to whom or what he thinks we are responsible it is not to God that he directs us but to the bureau of laws and regulations of the sovereign republic of the Universe.³²

The finite moral consciousness thus becomes the arbiter on every question of morality. It could not well be otherwise. Autonomy is the very definite implication of the creativity view of thought. If human thought is essentially creative it can allow for no heteronomy of any sort. Even though law be conceived of as absolute, this absoluteness is not really absolute. Laws are ideals and as such subject to transformation. The developing moral consciousness transforms them. Man is on this basis responsible to self, not to God. It is also important to note how completely Idealism has discarded God in its philosophy of religion. Many an idealist would perhaps agree that the validity of our own knowledge has its source in the Absolute and would still not hesitate to proclaim with Kant the complete autonomy of the moral consciousness.

In the philosophy of C. C. J. Webb we have a case in point. In his work, “Problems in the Relation of God and Man,” Webb clearly pronounces his general agreement with the idealist theory of logic. The usual idealistic argument for the necessity of a system is

³⁰ Cf. *Theistic Idealism*, pp. 1, 24, 152, 154, London, 1917.

³¹ “Relig. Phil. of Pringle Pattison,” *Mind*, N.S., v. 27, 1918, p. 273. Also *Contentio Veritatis*, p. 34, London 1902.

³² *Contentio Veritatis*, pp. 38, 39.

advanced fully. Still he thinks it quite possible to study the phenomena of the religious consciousness without any metaphysical presuppositions. Webb wants to have an Absolute and still be “neutral.” He tries like Bosanquet to serve two masters. He wishes to assume no metaphysics at the beginning of his investigation, which means that he has assumed the metaphysics of relativity. Webb has as a matter of fact assumed that religion must be worship of the whole.

If the Absolute of Idealism were God he would be determinative of the moral consciousness instead of the moral consciousness determinative of the Absolute. Still the later position is assumed without the least attempt to harmonize this position with the idealistic contention that Idealism presupposes the Absolute. Looking at the terrifying extent and character of evil Webb concludes that God cannot be omnipotent or he would have prevented the entrance of evil or at least long since have destroyed it. The moral consciousness is clearly said to be determinative of the Absolute; therefore Webb has no Absolute.

Surely on this issue Idealism ought to choose which master it will serve. If its demand for a presupposed Absolute be taken seriously then its “neutral” method in the philosophy of religion stands condemned. On the other hand if Idealism wishes to be “scientific” or “neutral” in its investigations of the religious and moral consciousness it must say farewell to the Absolute. The solution is sought by gradually immersing the Absolute. The idealistic philosophy of religion is built upon a metaphysical relativism throughout.

Thus we see that the view of the moral consciousness as determinative of the Absolute is the natural result of the Kantian creative theory of thought which is inherent in idealistic as well as Pragmatic logic. We are not surprised that Idealism approaches Pragmatism on this point. We should be surprised if it were not so. Both Idealism and Pragmatism attribute to man’s moral consciousness the power to modify the Absolute as will or to reject him altogether, and this cannot be done except on the presupposition that no Absolute exists.

Perhaps one of the keenest attempts of recent years to make the experience of God real to man is found in W. E. Hocking’s work, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*. Hocking would make the experience of God so basic that it will control the whole of life. Yes, even further: “Evil becomes a problem only because the consciousness of the Absolute is there: apart from this fact, the colour of evil would be mere contents of experience.”³³ Here Hocking maintains with specific reference to evil the general idealistic contention that no temporal experience of any sort could become a problem for thought were it not for the fundamental God-consciousness that underlies all our thinking. Hocking desires earnestly to do justice to this idea. If anywhere we shall expect that here God is presupposed.

The human self, says Hocking, placed within the stream of experience would have no meaning for itself nor would the current of phenomena urge upon us any problem were it not that at the outset the consciousness of the Absolute is given. The human self without the God-consciousness is but an “irrelevant universal.” It is not ourselves but God who is the first to be met with in experience. At least if God is not the first to be met with we will never meet him later. No God is found at the level of ideas that is not already found

³³ *Meaning of God*, p. 203.

at the level of sensation.³⁴ “The whole tale of Descartes’ discovery is not told in the proposition, I exist knowing. It is rather told in the proposition, I exist knowing the Absolute, or I exist knowing God.”³⁵ We see how basic Hocking attempts to make the God-concept. To show us the originality of the God-consciousness Hocking even seeks to restate the ontological argument. We do not first have an idea of God in order to deduce from this idea of God his existence but the idea is the fruit of a more fundamental intuition. “We are only justified in attributing reality to an idea of reality if reality is already present in the discovery of the idea.”³⁶ Such is Hocking’s argument. Despite this argument Hocking has not presupposed God. His has been after all an “Empirical development of Absolutism.”³⁷ As to form no Theist could wish for a better argument. But Hocking has not been faithful to his contention that if God has once been seen he remains forever after determinative of our experience. He tells us that early in life we have to face the grim reality that has produced us and yet seems to overwhelm its offspring and devour it. Immediately we sense our rights and: “The God-idea thus appears as a postulate of our moral consciousness: an original object of resolve which tends to make itself good in experience.”³⁸ The question that must here be pressed is: Whence this original sense of justice of which Hocking speaks? According to Hocking’s own mode of reasoning it should begin to function because of a God-consciousness which is fundamental to it. Only then would his splendid statement of the ontological argument be made effective for moral as well as for other ideas. But Hocking does not carry his argument through. Just at the crucial point he becomes unfaithful to it. For Hocking the first functioning of the moral consciousness is independent of God.³⁹ Man meets a universe first and a God afterwards. Thus man is the ultimate interpretative category in matters of morality. God becomes once more, for Hocking as for Webb, an Idea that may be and is constantly revised as human thought progresses. Before long Hocking tells us that the problem of the religious consciousness is a “problem of the attributes of reality.”⁴⁰

It would seem that the foregoing discussion has explained why it is that so often Theism and Idealism are considered to be close allies while in reality they are enemies. Idealism has constantly avowed its friendship towards Theism. Idealism has maintained the necessity of presupposing (a) a unity basic to diversity, (b) a timeless unity basic to diversity, and (c) one ultimate subject of interpretation. On these points Idealism only seems to stand with Theism for Idealism has also maintained that we must have (a) a plurality as basic as unity (b) a temporal plurality as basic as unity, and (c) a plurality of interpreters of Reality. These two conflicting tendencies cannot but seek to destroy one another. Logic demands that Idealism choose between the theistic and the pragmatic motifs. Logic also demands that if the pragmatic motif is entertained seriously at all it will win out altogether in time. History has amply justified the demands of logic. The

³⁴ *Idem*, p. 201.

³⁵ *Idem*, p. 201.

³⁶ *Idem*, p. 313.

³⁷ D. C. Macintosh, *Phil. Rev.*, v. 23, 1914, pp. 270 f.

³⁸ *Meaning of God*, p. 147.

³⁹ *Idem*, p. 146.

⁴⁰ *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, p. 143.

Absolute of Idealism is today no more than a logical principle and that a changing one. The "obsolescence of the eternal" has taken place. Idealism as well as Pragmatism is a foe of Theism; the "Absolute" is not God.

Recent American Philosophy

If one looks at the philosophical menu today one finds among others the following items of food: Absolutistic Personalism, a Search for a System, The Philosophy of a Meliorist, Philosophical Liberalism, *In Vestigiis Veritatis*, The Way of Opinion, Logic and Pragmatism, Problematic Realism, A Tentative Realistic Metaphysics, Confessions of an Animistic Materialist, Empirical Idealism, Personal Realism, Empiricism, and An Unborn Idealism.¹

For tomorrow's menu we are offered some additional items, such as: The Humanization of Philosophy, The Gospel of Technology, Toward a Social Philosophy, The Socialization of Morality, Experimental Naturalism, Toward Radical Empiricism in Ethics, An Amateur's Search for Significance, Toward a Naturalistic Conception of Logic, and A Catholic's View.²

We see from this simple enumeration of various points of view that there is a great activity in the field of philosophy in this country. Some sixty philosophers give us a sample of their credo in the three volumes from which the titles above are given. These represent a large fraternity now teaching at the many universities and colleges of the land.

In the second place, there seems to be a great independence of thought manifest among American philosophers today. There was a time when American philosophy, like American literature in general, was largely a rehash of what Europe, and particularly of what Great Britain offered. That is no longer the case. Looking at the whole scene in 1930, George Herbert Palmer, then past eighty said: "At present too little history is studied. Our young philosophers lack balance. Fifty years ago they lacked courage."³ A premature yearning for the niche and the palm seems to have induced a certain recklessness of spirit.

This leads us to think that the variety of foods that appear on the menu today is not so bewildering as it appears at first glance. When I eat at a "Child's Restaurant" for a considerable period of time, I become darkly suspicious that a comparatively small number of staple products compose all the host of dishes that are offered. There are many sandwiches for my choice: I seem to taste bread in them all. There are many salads alluring me; the royal lettuce appears in most of them. So, too, no really new foods have been discovered in America. We give men credit for the cleverness with which they make new combinations and give these combinations new names, but we cannot forsake our common sense that tells us that there is nothing new under the sun.

As to the ingredients from which all these combination-dishes are prepared, they are few indeed. For an appetizer we have the usual fruit-cup, now called experience. Plato no doubt relished biting into the eternal ideas at the outset of the meal. As for us, we need to be introduced gradually to such high and lofty realms. "In the beginning is the given."⁴ The pre-critical *datum* is absolutely uninterpreted.

¹ *Contemporary American Philosophy*, Personal Statements, Edited by George P. Adams and Wm. Repperell Montague. N.Y. 1930. Table of Contents.

² *American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow*. Edited by Horace M. Kallen and Sidney Hook.

³ *Contemp. Am. Phil.*, 1. p. 30.

⁴ *Idem*, 1 p. 61.

It is upon this pre-critical, uninterpreted *datum* that the human intelligence must begin its work.⁵ “The evidence which we can at present command compels the belief that man’s life on this planet is a unique phenomenon in the universe, and that he will in vain consult the stars or the heavens above to chart his course.”⁶ We consult no revelation of any sort.⁷

Does this declaration of autonomy mean that we think we can comprehend the whole of heaven and earth in our philosophy? Not at all. We have given up the search for absolutes and for universal validity.⁸ Mill, Spencer, and Darwin have taught us that the intellect is a late emergence in the evolutionary process.⁹ Bergson has not lived in vain.¹⁰ “No, the deeps of being are not to be charted by the lanterns, few and intermittent, that mark the hail coasts of human understandings, and the sum of all lights that men have found them is as a spark, kindled to fail.”¹¹ Even when we are old we shall say, “Because each of us is but a fragmentary being we must content ourselves with fragmentary insights.”¹² The “almightiness of thought is not so impressive as it was in the nineteenth century.”¹³ “We never know finally what the real is.”¹⁴

In fact, we know that the beginnings of things are utterly in the dark. “All cosmologies are figures of speech. To take them literally is to make nonsense of them.”¹⁵ “The cosmos, viewed as a whole, does not come into being or pass away. It is self-sustaining.”¹⁶ “Common to mankind is some myth of the Emergence.... But when, abandoning tales, we come home to life, then our single assurance is that the goddess Matuta first created light.”¹⁷

But this common acceptance of the myth of Matuta may seem to indicate that we bring our individual tastes with us when we begin our meal. And this is quite true. F. H. Bradley has taught us that “Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct.”¹⁸ John Dewey adds that “Meaning is wider in scope as well as more precious in value than is truth, and philosophy is occupied with meaning rather than with truth.”¹⁹ Accordingly there are large areas of life over which the claims of truth have no jurisdiction. Truth is important in “records of events and descriptions of existences.” “Beyond this island of meanings which in their own nature are true or false lies the ocean

⁵ *Idem*, 1 p. 145.

⁶ *Idem*, 1 p. 342.

⁷ Heinemann, *Neue Wege der Philosophie*, p. 21.

⁸ John Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty*.

⁹ *Idem*, 1 p. 21.

¹⁰ *Idem*, 1 p. 182.

¹¹ *Idem*, 1 p. 105.

¹² *Idem*, 1 p. 43.

¹³ *Idem*, 1 p. 151.

¹⁴ *Idem*, 1 p. 397.

¹⁵ *Idem*, 1 p. 419.

¹⁶ *Idem*, 1 p. 163.

¹⁷ *Idem*, 1 p. 397.

¹⁸ *An Anthology of Recent Philosophy*, Compiled by Daniel Sommer Robinson Ph.D., p. 13.

¹⁹ *Idem*, p. 49.

of meanings to which truth and falsity are irrelevant. We do not inquire whether Greek civilization was true or false, but we are immensely concerned to penetrate its meaning.”²⁰

All of us have learned a great lesson from Kant. That lesson is that we must not seek to get back of experience as the ancients did. Kant has taught us to take time seriously. From him we have learned that the “principles which lie at the basis of our knowledge are synthetic.” These principles “have no intrinsic necessity, and cannot possess the Absolute authority ascribed to them by the rationalists.”²¹

Having learned this lesson well, the “tender-minded” among us tend to monistic interpretations and the “tough-minded” among us tend to pluralistic interpretations.²² In our conventions we get “warmed up” to our debates and reject one another’s interpretations vehemently. “‘*Statt der lebendigen Natur,*’” we say, “‘*da Gott die Menschen schuf hinein,*’—that nebulous concoction, that wooden, that straight-laced thing, that crabbed artificiality, that musty schoolroom product, that sick man’s dream! Away with it. Away with all of them! Impossible! Impossible!”²³ But when the vision fades we know that we have dreamed dreams.²⁴ We know that none of us can interpret reality as a whole. *De gustibus non est disputandum.*

Yet there is one thing we cannot learn to like. None of us can bear the sight of Christian-theism. Christian-theism alone of all modern philosophies has refused to laugh with us at the conclusion of our “heated” debate. When a Christian-theist in all seriousness maintains that philosophy is not merely a matter of taste we look at him in astonishment. Has he not read Kant? Is he still seeking the Holy Grail of Absolute Truth? Has he never heard of the “obsolescence of the eternal”? But really we cannot stop to argue with him. When he presents his claims of an absolute God as the creator of this world, of Christ as the judge of sinners, and of the Scriptures as the source-book of true interpretation, we smile at him and say, “It is beautiful, beautiful indeed! Dante and Milton had wonderful imaginations!”

The net result is that though we have no use for the *Standpunktlosigkeit* of Moritz Schilck and the “new positivism,”²⁵ and therefore hold that one point of view is at the outset as good as another, there is one point of view that we cannot even consider. Thus if the Christian-theist should wish to do so he might claim that we are implying a universal negative proposition in our starting-point. He might even insist that we should make clear to ourselves this uncriticized assumption of absolutism and then seek in dead earnest to defend it. We shall simply ignore such unpleasant things.

The second course of our meal is that of scientific method. All of us are equally agreed that our method must be scientific even though we are not altogether at one as to what scientific method means. In fact here, too, we debate a great deal. The one rejects the other’s method because he thinks it is not sufficiently scientific.

²⁰ *Idem*, p. 49.

²¹ Norman Kemp Smith, *A Commentary to Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*. Second Edition, 1923, p. 35.

²² *An Anthology of Recent Philosophy*, p. 9.

²³ *Idem*, p. 9.

²⁴ *Idem*, p. 18.

²⁵ *Philosophical Review*, Vol. 44, no. 3, pp. 227 f.

On one thing we are all pretty well agreed, and that is that we want no a prioriism in our method. We all believe in the “open universe.” Even though we class ourselves as idealists and insist that we must presuppose a whole or Absolute in every judgment that we make, we must realize also that the categories of thought are not universally applicable and that the law of non-contradiction is itself an historical product. The program of life of the universe is “not deduced from a preformed purpose.”²⁶

We may contend with F. H. Bradley that “no mere particulars can be counted,”²⁷ and with B. Bosanquet that “the hope of complete enumeration is the justification of counting,”²⁸ yet we realize that with Kant we must assume the ultimacy of time. Reality must be an ‘eternal’ novelty, but it is also an eternal ‘novelty.’ Our nature itself is time-conditioned. It cannot set itself over against the stream of experience; it floats along with the stream. “The thing to be accounted for is our certainty that the facts must always conform to logic and arithmetic. To say that logic and arithmetic are contributed by us does not account for this. Our nature is as much a fact of the existing world as anything, and there can be no certainty that it will remain constant.”²⁹ Some of us hold therefore that “it is vain for any philosophy to pretend to prove all of its material propositions.”³⁰ In fact, “no existential proposition can be proved, for we have no indisputable existential propositions to use as premises.”³¹ Sometimes some of us feel that the principle of induction “cannot be established by experience, because we must possess and apply it in order to prove anything by means of experience.”³² If out of the grab-bag of experience “the first n balls taken from the top of the bag were all black,” there would be no appreciable probability that the next ball would be black. “To say that as the number of instances increases the probability increases, is to say, in effect, nothing at all. Similarly, it is idle to assert that with a ‘sufficient’ number of instances the probability closely approaches certainty, for there is nothing to indicate, even in the vaguest way, what a sufficient number may be.”³³

Of course, we do not conclude from all this that the condition of science is intolerable. We conclude only that the ideals which the “philosophers of the grand style” had set for themselves were in the nature of the case impossible of realization. They had sought to organize science into a system of reason, starting from definite data in the form either of self-evident principles or from particular contents of sensation, and progressing step by step without logical circularity. For part of the system universal premises alone were to be used, and the procedure was to be rigidly deductive and certain. For the remaining part the particulars of sense were to be included, and the procedure was to be fundamentally inductive and to be confined to probabilities. So-called rationalists and empiricists have differed as to the relative extent of the two parts of the system; but the

²⁶ *Contemp. Am. Phil.* 1 p. 398.

²⁷ F. H. Bradley, *Principles of Logic*. Second Edition, Vol. 1 Bk 2. Note on p. 369.

²⁸ B. Bosanquet, *Logic, or, The Morphology of Knowledge*, Vol. 1 p. 176. Oxford 1888.

²⁹ B. Russel, *Problems of Philosophy*, p. 135.

³⁰ *Contemp. Am. Phil.*, 1 p. 227.

³¹ *Idem*, 1 p. 284.

³² *Idem*, 1 p. 407.

³³ *Idem*, 1 p. 408.

general design is common to both.³⁴ But this design, “so far at least as it is concerned with knowledge of real existence, is chimerical. The history of science gives it no support. Human reason is never simply constructive, but always reconstructive. Science, like common sense, is at all times a going concern.”³⁵

All these high and noble ideals of a system of rational truth were based on the assumption that truth has a nature of its own. But we hold now that “there is no property whatsoever that is common to, and peculiar to, true propositions. Truth ... is an expression which has meaning only ‘in use.’”³⁶ There is “no room for a theory of truth.” But since we have absolutely no need for any such thing as a logically consistent system of truth, we do not worry about the future of science and of human knowledge in general. We seek by various sets of assumptions to explain experience as best we may. There may be other sets of assumptions that will also explain experience to a large degree.³⁷ Concrete things are not generated “by sublimated matings of abstract categories.” With Miquel de Unamuno we are disposed to relevelate into a metaphysical principle “the concept of the real as paradoxical; and the only strictly rational beings are such things as typewriters and gasoline engines.”³⁸ “A philosophy is, therefore, in its core a program for a way of living from which emanate specific directional tendencies of thinking, feeling, and willing. We demand consistency and truth of philosophies merely because inconsistencies and untruths seem to be obstacles to the realization of what is peculiarly human in our potentialities as living beings.”³⁹

You may see then that our methodology is in accord with our starting-point. We assume with the scientists that some millions of years ago one of the cooling fragments of the sun “we know not how, when, or why,” gave birth to life. Now if the universe goes on for long enough “every conceivable accident is likely to happen in time.”⁴⁰ Our logic is the product of our psychology, and our psychology is the product of cosmical accident. Our starting-point is therefore largely a matter of taste and our method also is largely a matter of taste. One logic may fit reality about as well as another.

Yet as there was one starting-point that none of us can accept so there is one method that none of us can accept. We could not accept the Christian-theistic starting-point and we cannot accept a Christian-theistic methodology. That is, we cannot accept a consistently Christian methodology. We should not much object to the method of neo-Scholasticism.⁴¹ Nor are we much disturbed by the method of a Protestant philosophy that is built upon or consistent with Arminian theology. These methods agree with our own to a large extent in their assumptions. These methods agree with our own in assuming that the facts of experience which are to be interpreted and the mind of man that is to interpret them at the outset exist and operate independently of God. Their

³⁴ *Idem*, 1 p. 405.

³⁵ *Idem*, 1 p. 405.

³⁶ *Idem*, 1 p. 412.

³⁷ *Idem*, 1 p. 227.

³⁸ *Idem*, 1 p. 360.

³⁹ *Idem*, 1 p. 193.

⁴⁰ James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, p. 4.

⁴¹ *American Philosophy Today and Tomorrow*, article on Neo-Scholasticism.

method can at best lead to a finite God and we do not seriously object to a man who has a finite God.

A consistent Christian methodology, however, one that is in agreement with Reformed theology, we must all reject. Such a method presupposes that God has pre-interpreted “whatsoever comes to pass.” This would, we hold, kill all interest in our quest because it would exclude all real novelty from the universe.

We do not mind the method of idealistic philosophy which also seems to say that the whole must be prior to the part if there is to be a fruitful methodology. These idealists are not in dead earnest about this. They realize full well that there must be real novelty. For that reason they do not take their Absolute, or God, too seriously. They make his eternity correlative to time. This provides for real novelty. This also keeps God from being the only ultimate interpreter; it makes us at least co-laborers with God, on a par with him.

But the Christian-theists of the Reformed stamp take their God seriously. Their God has made everything. He controls everything. This means that man is but the re-interpreter of God’s interpretation of all facts. This means that, since error is here, man is responsible for it. Man is a sinner. His mind is abnormal as well as derivative. He needs the Bible now to know facts truly.

With all this we can have nothing to do. We assume in our methodology the ultimacy and the normalcy of the human mind and of the things it seeks to know. Our method, like our starting-point, assumes that Reality is just here somehow. We assume an ultimate Irrationalism in both method and starting-point. If then the Christian-theist urges that we ought to justify our assumptions critically and say why we are certain even in our starting-point and in our methodology that the God of Christian-theism does not exist, we merely shrug our shoulders. We are really making a universal negative judgment in our methodology as well as in our starting-point, on the basis of a universe which, because it is “open,” may reverse our judgments at any time. But we must hasten on to our main course, namely, Metaphysics.

As to this main course of our philosophical dinner it must again be said that there is considerable variety of taste among us. The menu itself shows this. It would not offer as much variety as it does if our tastes did not differ. There are some of us who still like idealistic dishes, but most of us prefer some sort of realism or pragmatism. We have become pretty well convinced that Reality is a stream, and that whatever gods there be swim with us in this stream. All the gods worth worshiping are finite.

It will be observed at once that this main course fits in well with our methodology and our starting-point. It is a foregone conclusion that if one assumes Irrationalism at the outset and if one’s method is the so-called scientific method, one’s conclusion must be an ultimate temporalism.

Yet it is not very long ago that many of us seemed to have no use for temporalism at all. Idealism of the Hegelian type was dominant in Great Britain till the beginning of the present century, and Josiah Royce, the great American idealist, himself influenced by British philosophy, in turn became a great power in our land. There were other influences, to be sure, such as that of German philosophy. Many of our university professors of philosophy have studied in Germany. Then there was Scottish Realism.⁴² Speaking generally, however, we may say that we have been greatly influenced by the

⁴² S. Volbeda, *De Intuitieve Philosophic van James McCosh*.

British Hegelianism of such men as Thomas Hill Green⁴³, Francis Herbert Bradley⁴⁴, Bernard Bosanquet⁴⁵, Edward Caird⁴⁶, Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison⁴⁷, and James Ward.⁴⁸

But even these names themselves indicate a shift in recent British philosophy. Not to speak of Samuel Alexander, the very tide of whose book, *Space-Time and Deity*, indicates a reaction against idealism, or of Charles Sanders Peirce,⁴⁹ who is often called the father of pragmatism; we observe in Pringle-Pattison and Ward a deflection from the rigid idealism of Bradley and Bosanquet in the direction of greater personalism and temporalism. For both Bradley and Bosanquet logical consistency was the test of Reality. The “*wetenschaps-ideaal*” swept everything before itself. Bosanquet stoutly asserted that “the hunt of the psychologically primitive is the root of all evil.”⁵⁰ In their magnificent works on logic both Bradley and Bosanquet had developed a theory of judgment in which the human individual making the judgment is but the mouthpiece of the Absolute speaking about itself.⁵¹ Human personalities were but “loci” or “connections of content” of the life of the Absolute.

There was a decided acosmic strain in this absolute Idealism. In their ethical writings Bradley and Bosanquet wanted man to be sublated (*aufgehoben*) into the life of the Absolute. “The unit makes no insistence on its finite or isolable character. It looks, as in religion, from itself and not to itself, and asks nothing better than to be lost in the whole which is at the same time its own best.”⁵² They spoke frequently of God or the Absolute as the Beyond, and said that the lower forms of existence must be interpreted in terms of the higher forms of existence. J. E. McTaggart boldly maintained the unreality of time.⁵³ Against this acosmic tendency of Absolute Idealism, Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison sounded the bugle call of rebellion. In his little book *Hegelianism and Personality* he

⁴³ I. H. Green, *Works*, Vol. 1. Ed. by R. S. Nettleship, Lond. 1893.

⁴⁴ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality; a metaphysical Essay*, Lond. 1893. *The Principles of Logic—Sec. Ed.*

⁴⁵ B. Bosanquet, (1) *Logic, or, Morphology of Knowledge*, 2 vol. (2) *Essentials of Logic; being ten lectures on judgment and inference*, Lond. 1895. (3) *Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, Lond. 1921. (4) *Value and Destiny of the Individual*. (5) *The Principle of Individuality and Value*.

⁴⁶ Edw. Caird, *Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*, 2 vol. N.Y. 1889.

⁴⁷ Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison, *Hegelianism and Personality*, Edinburg, 1893.

⁴⁸ J. Ward, (1) *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, 2 v. N.Y. 1899. (2) *Psychological Principles*, Ed. 2. Cambridge, 1920. (3) *Realm of Ends, or Pluralism and Theism*. Cambridge, 1911.

⁴⁹ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Ed. by Chas. Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Harv. Univ. Press.

⁵⁰ B. Bosanquet in *Review of B. Russel's Book on Our Knowledge of the External World as a Field for Scientific Method in Philosophy*. *Phil. Rev.*, 1915.

⁵¹ F. H. Bradley, *Logic*. B. Bosanquet, *Logic*.

⁵² F. H. Bradley, *Mind*, N.S.V. 19. p. 154.

⁵³ *The Nature of Existenz*, 2 vol. Esp. *Mind*, N.S., 1893, p. 490; *Mind*, N.S., 1894, p. 190; *Mind*, N.S., 1908, p. 457. See A. E. Taylor's criticism of this view in his *The Faith of a Moralist*, Vol. 1, p. 112 f.

insisted on the “imperviousness” of human personality. In a symposium before the Aristotelian Society he contended against Bosanquet that individuals have substantive rather than adjectival existence.⁵⁴ In his book *The Idea of God in Modern Philosophy* he worked out his position fully. Bosanquet reviewed this book, and said that its position would lead to Pluralism. To this Pringle-Pattison replied that Bosanquet should not underestimate “the significance of numerical identity as the basal characteristic of concrete existence.”⁵⁵ To be sure, Pringle-Pattison did not want to fall back into any sort of empiricism, since it forgets “the abstraction under which it apprehends the structure of experience.”⁵⁶ He is therefore willing to grant that individuals by themselves are abstractions, but he adds that the Absolute or Beyond of Bosanquet tends to become an abstraction as well. Bosanquet’s philosophy, he holds, tends “to reach a formal identity by abstracting from differences on which the very character of the universe as a spiritual cosmos depends.”⁵⁷

Thus we can clearly see that the “*persoonlijkheidsideaal*” is gaining on the “*wetenschapsideaal*.” The human individual is asserting its “rights.” The “Beyond” of Bosanquet is more and more clearly shown to be merely a correlative to man. For it should be noticed that Pringle-Pattison holds to essentially the same theory of judgment as Bosanquet. He seeks to show that according to the basic principles of idealistic logic, so well stated by Bosanquet himself, we cannot believe in a God that is more than a correlative to man.

In a somewhat different way James Ward reacted against the Absolutism of Bradley and Bosanquet. He too, like Pringle-Pattison, stressed the ultimacy of human personality. He did this particularly in the field of psychology.⁵⁸ But from psychology he went on to metaphysics. In two books, *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, and *The Realm of Ends*, he set forth his argument for an idealism that should begin with pluralism.⁵⁹ He too feared that the Absolute would swallow up human personality. “In whatever sense you say Absolute, in that sense you cannot say many.”⁶⁰ For that reason he insisted that in our philosophical reasoning we cannot begin with God. “We cannot begin from God and construct the universe.”⁶¹ “If we attempt to conceive of God apart from the world there is nothing to lead us on to creation.”⁶² It is rather “from the reality of the world that we start.”⁶³ If we conclude to the existence of God, such a God must live in accordance with the conditions of this universe. “As immanent in this world, God must, it would seem, so far be conceived as subject to its fundamental conditions.”⁶⁴ In fact, much of the talk of God’s transcendence is based upon a violation of the categories of our experience. “If the

⁵⁴ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1917–18, p. 511.

⁵⁵ *Idem*, 1917–18, p. 512.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, 1917–18, p. 484.

⁵⁷ *Idem*, 1917–18, p. 522.

⁵⁸ J. Ward, *Psychological Principles*.

⁵⁹ Muirhead, “The Last Phase of Professor Ward’s Philosophy,” *Mind*, 1913.

⁶⁰ *The Realm of Ends*, p. 37.

⁶¹ *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, 2 p. 120.

⁶² *The Realm of Ends*, p. 309.

⁶³ *Idem*, p. 245.

⁶⁴ *Idem*, p. 194.

categories of substance and cause are only valid within experience they cannot be applied to experience as a whole. Whatever implications experience may involve, it surely cannot involve that of transcending itself. Such misled transcendence, if it have any validity, must really be immanence at bottom.”⁶⁵

This criticism on absolute idealism made by Andrew Seth Pringle-Pattison and by James Ward is typical of the criticism made by many others. It represents a tendency to reduce the God of idealism from a Beyond to a universal principle within mankind. The contention is made by these critics that according to the logic of idealism itself, we are not entitled to a really transcendent God. The God of Idealism when conceived of as Beyond can be no more than a hypostatization. Such was the criticism made in Great Britain. Such was also the criticism made in America.

The first great American idealist was Josiah Royce. He taught at Harvard where he influenced many men who are now professors of philosophy in the various universities of the land. He constructed his system of philosophy under the critical eye of William James, the great pragmatist, who taught with him at Harvard.

Royce’s philosophy is an idealism which tries desperately to do “justice” to the human individual, while yet the doctrine of God as a Beyond is maintained. He himself engaged in a detailed criticism of Bradley. Bradley had contended that if we rigidly apply the test of logical consistency to experience—and that is, he thinks, exactly what we are bound to do—the concept of the self, whether human or divine, is self-contradictory. He felt that the contradictions which he found all through experience would “somehow” be solved in the Absolute. Royce disliked this lapse into the Irrational. He set out to prove that God, a transcendent God, can sustain a rational relation to us, while neither he nor we lose any of our individuality.

Speaking of Bradley’s Absolute, Royce says, “The Absolute, then, is above the Self, above any mere form of selfhood. The fact that it is thus above selfhood is something ‘not other than experience’; but it is wholly experience, and is the Absolute Experience itself. In fine, then, the Absolute, in Mr. Bradley’s view, knows itself so well—experiences so fully its own nature—that it sees itself to be no self, but a self-absorber, ‘self-pervading,’ to be sure, and ‘self-existent,’ but aware of itself in the end as something on which there is no real self to be aware of. Or, in other words, the Absolute is really aware of itself as being not Reality, but Appearance, just in so far as it is a self.”⁶⁶

Now Royce argues that we need not, as Bradley did, destroy both the human and the divine Self in order to have a logically consistent interpretation of Reality. For him Reality, including God and man, is a self-representative system. “The Universe, as Subject-Object, contains a complete and perfect image or view of itself. Hence it is, in structure, at once One, as a single system, and also an endless *Kette*. Its form is that of a Self... The logic of Being has, as a central theorem, the assertion, ‘Whatever is, is a part of a self-imaged system,’ of the type herein discussed. This truth is a common property for all, whether realists or idealists, whether sceptics or dogmatists ... I am obliged to regard this result as of the greatest weight in any metaphysical enterprise. No philosophy that wholly ignores this elementary fact can be called rational. And hereby we have

⁶⁵ *Naturalism and Agnosticism*, 2 p. 129.

⁶⁶ Josiah Royce, *The World and the Individual, First Series*, p. 552.

indeed found a sense in which the ‘endless fission’ of Mr. Bradley expresses not mere Appearance but Being. Here is a law not only of Thought but also of Reality. Here is the true union of the One and the Many. Here is a multiplicity that is not ‘absorbed,’ or ‘transmuted’ but retained by the Absolute. And it is a multiplicity of individual facts that are still One in the Absolute.”⁶⁷

We begin to see something of the drift of American idealism from these typical statements of Royce. The human individual must stand in his own rights next to God. It works out its own theory of judgment in consonance with its own assumed ultimacy, and then adjusts its God-concept accordingly. If this process is carried out, as it was carried out, more and more consistently, God will grow smaller and smaller. We must now see how the God of idealism gradually became immersed in the temporal stream of the universe.

One of the editors of *The Philosophical Review*, G. Watts Cunningham, traces the course of events very lucidly in his book, *The Idealistic Argument in Recent British and American Philosophy*. The gist of the argument against absolute idealism, says Cunningham, is, in effect, that it does not live up to its own view of experience. To quote: “The whole matter may perhaps be put briefly. If the Absolute is to grow logically out of what is ‘within our own experience,’ then it must be conceived so as to leave room for finite centers of experience standing in their integrity. If it is not so conceived it is, so far, arbitrarily conceived, and must remain for us unintelligible, unexplained in detail, as any general view must, but in the further and objectionable sense that one (apparently basal) character of experience is left standing outside as a negative instance. On this point, then, the case of the personalist against the absolutist is essentially sound.”⁶⁸

The Absolute “is to grow logically out of what is within our own experience.” This was very definitely, says Cunningham, the claim of Bradley and Bosanquet themselves. If the Absolute is to stand “it must serve as a principle of explanation of experience that is, it must grow out of experience as a necessary implication of it. So much the Absolutists admits, at least verbally. But his procedure seems to belie his profession; for he is apparently willing to truncate experience in order to fit it in with the conception of the Absolute. Herein lies the basis of justification for the accusation frequently advanced against him that he dares not, as he professes, derive the conception of the Absolute from an analysis and interpretation of experience, but rather, forcibly bends experience at those points where it does not readily accommodate itself to the menaces of the conception of the Absolute as more or less arbitrarily defined.”⁶⁹

Now we can readily understand, says Cunningham, how it was that the Absolutists fell into the temptation of believing in an Absolute into whom we as human beings are “somehow” to be transmuted. This Absolute must “somehow” explain what we cannot explain. Any “general view” of reality must allow for the “negative instance.” There is a novelty to life that refuses to be fitted into our logical schematism. This Fact we must all admit. But this fact presents us with a clear-cut alternative. We can be consistent with our own basic starting-point or we can be inconsistent. If we are consistent, the God or

⁶⁷ *Idem*, First Series, p. 553.

⁶⁸ G. Watts Cunningham, *The Idealistic Argument in Recent British and American Philosophy*, p. 536.

⁶⁹ *Idem*, p. 534.

Absolute in whom we believe must be a “necessary implication” of our experience. He must be intelligible to us as we must be intelligible to him. There must be a clear-cut logical or rational relation between him and us.

On the other hand if we are inconsistent we define our Absolute independently of our experience. In that case he will have a nonrational relation to us; he will be “somehow” related to us and we “somehow” related to him. God is then not intelligible to us and we are not intelligible to him.

The whole point may be stated differently by saying that we must either make God surround that which is irrational to us, or we must make that which is irrational to us surround God as well as ourselves. God either includes the “negative instance,” or the “negative instance” includes God. God either controls the devil or the devil, in some measure at least, controls God. Reality is either such that there is novelty for us but no novelty for God, either such that there is novelty for God as well as for us.

Now the Absolute Idealists, says Cunningham, have chosen the inconsistent position. If they had been consistent with their own theory of judgment, they should have thought of an Absolute who is intelligible to us. An Absolute who is not intelligible to us must, since he is by definition absolute and we are by definition something less than absolute, “sublate” or “transmute” us. Such an Absolute explains us by explaining us away.

That the criticism thus offered against absolutism is to the point may be seen from the fact that the Absolutist is himself quite willing to have his conception of the Absolute tested by what he thinks of as the ordinary tests of logical procedure. The Absolute is offered very definitely as a help to the logical understanding of experience. This point needs to be emphasized “since some of the critics of absolutism have sometimes written as if they supposed the absolutist to assume that his conception of the Absolute was somehow logically privileged and not subject to the ordinary rules of logical procedure. It is clear that the absolutist assumes nothing of the sort; at least it should be clear to anyone who has taken the trouble to become acquainted with his argument. He is perfectly willing to subject the conception to the ordinary tests of intelligibility; and, in the main, he is in agreement with the preceding statement of what those tests concretely are. What he contends is that his conception is required by any adequate analysis of experience, and he is willing to have his conception tried by any such analysis.”⁷⁰ Both thinkers, Bradley and Bosanquet, “persist in holding also that the conception of the Absolute may in some meaningful sense be said to satisfy the intellect.”⁷¹

But now the difficulty is that Bradley and Bosanquet will either have to give up their own theory of judgment, or they will have to give up thinking of the Absolute as not intelligible to us. “What I venture to urge is that this position will have to be abandoned, or the theory of judgment with which we started will have to be disavowed. For the position is equivalent to holding that the ‘real reality’ which ultimately satisfies is not such that it can significantly function as the subject which the judgment seeks in seeking its satisfaction.”⁷²

We may observe here in passing how intricately logic and methodology are interwoven with metaphysics in the minds of idealistic thinkers. A certain view of

⁷⁰ *Idem*, p. 523.

⁷¹ *Idem*, p. 553.

⁷² *Idem*, p. 553.

judgment, so runs the argument, invariably brings with it a certain view of reality. Is there then perhaps some truth to the claims made by Christian-theists, that the assumed irrationality of one's starting-point and of our methodology must inevitably lead us into the camp of those who openly avow their belief in an ultimately unrelated or open universe?

But let us forget these misgivings for the present. Perhaps we can still retain something of our own idealism even while we consistently follow out the logic of our own theory of judgment. After all, why should the Absolute: need to be so "absolutely other" as Bradley and Bosanquet seemed at some times to picture him? Did these men themselves in their best moments really believe in a God not logically or necessarily related to us?

As for Bosanquet we may say that in his best moments he forgot his acosmic longings. Often he defines the Absolute as the "Whole." Paraphrasing his thought we may say that the Absolute "is all that is." Accordingly, "a basal characteristic of the Absolute is 'negativity.'" ⁷³ When first we look at experience, contradiction seems to characterize it. But this contradiction is emended until it becomes frictionless in the form of negativity. Quoting from Bosanquet we observe that friction "is the same characteristic which has been described as the fact that experience is always beyond itself—the character, indeed, which we have described from the beginning as that of which the universal, or, in other words, the tendency of every *datum* to transcend itself as a fragment and complete itself in the whole." ⁷⁴ This contradiction turns into negativity and negativity "is really affirmation—affirmation of differences, with contradiction removed..." When we say, then, that negativity is a characteristic of the Absolute, what is to be understood is that, in the Absolute, contradiction has entirely disappeared, while the spirit of difference survives in its highest form. The Absolute negates conflict and confusion, it affirms system and significant opposition; and to put the matter paradoxically, "its negation and its affirmation are one and the same." ⁷⁵

All this indicates that as human beings we are, according to Bosanquet, not to be entirely "transmuted" beyond recognition after all. The contradiction of our finitude will at least abide as a permanent "difference" within the Absolute. This much we know since it follows from our theory of judgment. To this extent the Absolute is not unintelligible to us; we have trimmed him to some extent down to the needs of our intelligibility. And to this extent we are also pushing the remnants of the irrational beyond God as well as beyond ourselves.

There is encouragement for us in all this to think that as human beings we make a real contribution to the life of the Absolute. We have spoken of the Absolute as "Beyond." But by this thinking of the Absolute as "beyond" we have never meant what Christian theology means when it thinks of God as self-sufficient. On the contrary, "The perfection of the Absolute ... must not be conceived as excluding the processes through which these finite systems are completed. For its own self-completion the Absolute presupposes the temporal order, the hazards and hardships of finite selfhood; apart from this order and the

⁷³ *Idem*, p. 141.

⁷⁴ *Idem*, p. 417—quoted from Bosanquet, *The Principle of Individuality and Value*, p. 228.

⁷⁵ *Idem*, p. 142.

content it furnishes the Absolute would be nothing at all. Its very perfection is dependent upon the temporal instruments through which that perfection is achieved; its negativity belongs as much to them as to itself.”⁷⁶ Thus Bosanquet speaks of the Absolute as “simply the high-water mark of fluctuations in experience, of which, in general, we are daily and normally aware.”⁷⁷

It appears that the Absolute of Bosanquet is, when his argument is most consistent with itself, first demoted from a “Beyond to the Whole,” and then from the “Whole” to the “Universal” within human experience. Reality for Bosanquet seems to be like a string of beads. God is the string, the universal, while temporal plurality furnishes the beads. Without either you do not have a string of beads.

In his book *The Meeting of Extremes in Contemporary Philosophy*, Bosanquet divided philosophies into two classes. On the one hand there is the class of the “progressists.” They demand that there shall be “absolute and ultimate progression in the real.” On the other hand there is the class which we may call “perfectionists.” For them the temporal series is “only an adumbration” of a “deeper totality which in its perfection knows no change.”⁷⁸ The former wish to put “the Absolute in time,” while the latter wish to put “time in the Absolute.” Now the question is whether these “extremes” are really as far apart as Bosanquet would have them appear.

Cunningham thinks they are not. If the Absolute must really depend for its content on the time-series, as Bosanquet says it must, it follows that wholly new content may appear for the Absolute. Thus the “negative instance” is really beyond God, as well as beyond man. Reality answers to the demand of our logical theory that the analytic and the synthetic aspects of judgment must be equally basic.⁷⁹ We are consistent with our basic theory of judgment and give up the notion that God is not himself surrounded by the Irrational.

As a compromise between the alternative “time in the Absolute” or “the Absolute in time,” Cunningham suggests a third possibility, namely, “the Absolute through time,” and adds, “If the conciliatory position here suggested is accepted, of course the non-temporal character of the Absolute is forthwith surrendered, and a qualification of its character of all-inclusiveness is called for.”⁸⁰ This, Cunningham holds, would really be in accord with the idealistic theory of judgment and with the scientific method. On the one hand we must posit a unity in experience or we could ask no questions about it. On the other hand there must be the wholly new, or our questions would be answered in advance of the asking. Bradley was right in speaking of this two-fold nature of reality as being ultimately mysterious. “This two-fold nature of reality by which it slides away from itself in our distinction, so as there to become a predicate the while all the time it retains in itself, as an ultimate subject, every quality we loosen from and relate to it, is, if you please, inexplicable.”⁸¹ But Bradley and Bosanquet did not always bring out clearly that God and man together form Reality, which reality has a novelty as well as a

⁷⁶ *Idem*, p. 143.

⁷⁷ *Idem*, p. 140.

⁷⁸ *Idem*, p. 417.

⁷⁹ Bosanquet, *Phil. Rev.*, Vol. 32, 1923, p. 596.

⁸⁰ G. W. Cunningham, *op. cit.* p. 422.

⁸¹ F. H. Bradley, *Logic*, Vol. 2, p. 320.

permanent aspect. They sometimes made it appear that the Absolute was wholly beyond time, and therefore beyond the difficulties that meet those who are in some sense subject to the limitations of time. But now to see clearly that God or the Absolute himself is faced with novelty; he has now no advantage over us. We have discussed Cunningham's views somewhat fully because his criticism is similar to that of several others. A considerable number of essays appeared in *The Philosophical Review* dealing with the philosophy of Bradley and Bosanquet.⁸² These essays follow an argument similar to that of Cunningham.

Such idealism, then, as the American scene presents today, is of a much milder variety than that of the absolute idealism of a generation ago. The idealism of Ernest Hocking e.g., as set forth in his book, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience*, may well be spoken of as an "Empirical Development of Absolutism."⁸³ Men still speak of interpreting the lower in terms of the higher, and of striving for the ideal, but scarcely anyone thinks seriously of giving metaphysical status to a non-temporal God.

It is no wonder, then, that the philosophical menu today offers little besides neo-Realism, critical realism, and pragmatism in various forms. All of these schools and the varieties among them believe in the "open universe." To them reality is a flux. The human mind must seek as best it can to help the human organism make its necessary adjustments to its environment. The *a priori* element within experience has itself been generated in the course of the evolutionary process, and can never claim to furnish the foundation for universal judgments.

Thus we see that the main course of metaphysics has again offered a great variety, which variety can be reduced to a few simple ingredients. The idealistic dishes are ordered by a very few, and when brought in are covered with a coating of empiricism. Most men go for the plainer forms of temporalism.

Naturally if some Christian-theist should slip into the room and look over the menu he would find nothing to suit his taste. The head waiter and all the guests would look at him in amazement. "Do you wish for idealism?" the waiter will ask. "Oh yes, we still carry idealism; this is what Hocking usually takes, and many 'church-people' seem to like the same dish." But the Christian-theist shakes his head. He says he would like to have plain Christian-theism in which God is self-sufficient, and the temporal world is created and sustained by him. The head-waiter offers him Neo-Scholasticism, hid away somewhere at the bottom corner of the menu. The Christian-theist again shakes his head. He says he prefers simple Christian-theism which really puts God back of "whatsoever comes to pass." The guests all look at him again. Can anyone really be in earnest demanding Christian-theism? Can anyone today still hold that reality is a closed system for God? No one with any intelligence believes in such a God today.

If, then, the Christian-theist should humbly but persistently reply that without such a God no one has a right to believe in intelligence, and in the intelligibility of anything, he will again be met with a smile. "It is beautiful! it is beautiful!" they will say, and continue to eat their ultimate temporalisms.

Nothing daunted, they will call for the waitress to bring in the dessert. The dessert is something very light. It consists of a transparent gelatin of various colors, called "Follow

⁸² See especially *Philosophical Review* for 1920, 1921, 1922, 1923.

⁸³ D. C. Macintosh on Hocking, *Phil. Rev.*, 1914, pp. 27 f.

the Gleam.” Let Hocking tell us why it is given this name. Merlin the magician, he tells us, counselor at the court of King Arthur, suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. “Many years later a wanderer lost in the mountains fell exhausted to the ground, and was startled to hear a voice coming as it seemed from the depths of the earth, and speaking in an ancient and uncouth form. He understood that the voice purported to be the voice of Merlin, and that a spell was being told, which, if spoken from above, would break the prison and set Merlin free.”

“But he could distinguish only a few syllables.... Now every seventh year a traveler is lured to that spot and another fragment of the spell is recovered and another song is made. But Merlin cannot be released until the travelers meet and join their fragments into a complete saying.”

“We philosophers, the travelers of the myth, are taking part in an age-long labor of release. The meanings we find are actual possibilities buried in the heart of the world. Our different reports are, in part, our own creations, wrought by imagination and added to the wealth of racial poetry. But they are, first of all, our debt to the infinite imprisoned meaning of the world. Our differences cannot be regarded as mere personal accidents; for it is because of these differences that the whole spell may be recovered. If we learn how our thoughts belong together, Merlin may yet walk the earth again.”⁸⁴

To this, as Christian-theists, we must beg to reply that on the suppositions of modern philosophy taken as a whole, “Merlin” will never walk the earth again. Hocking is not entitled to the optimism which his parable would convey. Given a reality including God, which is by definition gradually emerging from the void, and which still brings forth the wholly new, and the intellect of man is as a derelict adrift on a shoreless sea. The island of intelligibility is then floating upon and surrounded by the unintelligible, the unintelligible to God as well as to man. The starting-point, the method, and the conclusion of modern philosophy are in accord with one another; they all with one voice speak one word, Irrationalism. This is the night in which all cows are black; non-Christian thought has demonstrated again that without the God of Christian-theism intelligent predication becomes a myth.

Thus modern philosophy adds its voice to the voice of modern science, saying that it has really “no pronouncement to make” since “the river of knowledge has too often turned back upon itself.”⁸⁵ The need for a Christian-theistic philosophy setting forth and defending the “pronouncement” of God faithfully in accord with Reformed conviction, would seem to be highly necessary.

⁸⁴ E. Hocking, in *Anthology of Recent Philosophy*.

⁸⁵ J. Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*, p. 160.

The Theism Of A. E. Taylor

A number of recent British philosophers have made a particularly attractive offer of peace and co-operation to orthodox believers. We refer to such men as A. Seth Pringle-Pattison, James Ward, Hastings Rashdall and Clement C. J. Webb. These men have reacted against what they regarded as a Spinozistic interpretation of Hegel given by F. H. Bradley, Bernard Bosanquet and others. The theism that these men offer to us seems to resemble the theism taught in Scripture so much that one may easily be led to identify them.

Perhaps the most comprehensive presentation of this type of theism has been given by A. E. Taylor. He has written the article on "Theism" in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*. He has written a large work on Plato in which he constantly speaks of the theism of Plato. His views on theism have had their fullest expression, however, in the Gilford Lectures given in the years 1926–27 and 1927–28 and published under the title *The Faith of a Moralist*.

That Taylor's philosophy has a direct bearing upon modern theology appears from the fact that he is an active member of the Anglican communion. To the volume *Essays Catholic and Critical*; edited by Edward Gordon Selwyn, Taylor contributed an article on "The Vindication of Religion." The purpose of the volume as a whole, and of Taylor's article in particular, is to maintain the place of authority in religion without doing injustice to reason.

The influence of Taylor's philosophy seems to be very great. Wilfred L. Knox and Alec R. Vidler have published a book *The Development of Modern Catholicism*. In this book they discuss the question of the relation between faith and reason. They seek to give a history of the debate on this subject during the various decades of the nineteenth century. They contend that although it may have been doubtful in the nineteenth century, in our day we may be certain that the real issue lies within the field of philosophy.¹ We need a philosophy, they feel, that can do justice to Christianity "as embodying a direct revelation of God on the stage of history," and "which can legitimately claim the free assent of human reason."² Where shall we look for such a philosophy? The authors make reply as follows: "The most important achievement of Anglo-Catholic theology since the War in this field is undoubtedly to be found in *The Faith of a Moralist* (The Gifford Lectures for 1926–28), by Professor A. E. Taylor (Macmillan, 1930)."³ They devote an entire chapter to the exposition of Taylor's philosophy as set forth in the book mentioned above.

It will be observed that the problem of faith and reason, or, more specifically, the problem of a unique historical revelation as the object of faith and the universal validity claimed for the pronouncements of reason, is the problem with which the dialectic theologians, Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, busy themselves again and again. Emil Brunner, in his book *The Mediator* has given an extensive discussion of this question. The solution offered to this question by Brunner has been regarded with favor by certain

¹ *The Development of Modern Catholicism*, 1933, p. 269.

² *Idem*, p. 268.

³ *Idem*, p. 271.

Reformed theologians. The solution of this problem offered by Taylor may possibly be regarded with favor by other Reformed theologians.

As for modern theologians in this country, we may say that both solutions have found favorable consideration. By way of illustration we mention the two books written by Walter Marshall Hotton. In his *Contemporary English Theology* he feels that we in America ought to look for a solution of our theological problems along the lines offered by “the leading figures in contemporary English theology” chiefly for the reason that in England reason has free play. In his book on *Contemporary Continental Theology* he expresses himself as having a great sympathy for certain developments in theology on the continent. Continental theology, he feels, has a keen eye for the unique, for that which comes to us from the “fourth dimension.”

It is our business, then, as Reformed theologians, who hold to historic Christianity, to analyze as carefully as we may the claims of dialectic theology on the one hand and the claims of idealistic philosophy on the other hand. In this article we consider the claims of idealist philosophy as represented by Taylor.

As over against materialism and mechanism, Taylor, like the idealists in general, wants to interpret “the lower in the terms of the higher.” He has no sympathy with humanism or with naturalism. In the pages of Taylor we do not hear much about Russell or about Dewey except by way of negative criticism. On the other hand we are led into an acquaintance with such men as Pascal and Augustine. Our enemies seem to be his enemies and our friends seem to be his friends. Taylor sets his face resolutely against some of the patent heresies of the day. He is utterly opposed to all forms of anti-intellectualism and individualism.

Still further, he seems to spend his energies freely for the defense of the historical in religion. A religion “within the limits of pure reason” finds no favor with him. Taylor is very critical of those who would extend the powers of reason to such an extent as to make impossible the appearance of the absolutely new in the course of history. He has some fine things to say about those ministers who are, so to speak, constantly hanging on the skirts of Eddington and Jeans. He wishes historical religion to stand on its own feet.⁴ The Gilford lectureship requires men to deal with natural theology only but Taylor seems to have found a natural theology that can allow for revelation. His natural theology even allows for the fact of sin. It allows for the “initiative of the eternal,” for otherworldliness, for the supernatural and the miraculous. It gives place to authority, to institutions, and to sacraments.

It is well then that we consider Taylor’s philosophy with care and sympathy. Taylor apparently wishes to be our friend. More than that, he desires to dwell with us in the same institution and to partake of the same sacramental meal. Must we refuse to eat with him? Must we refuse to live under the same roof with him? Must we even refuse to call him our friend?

In the fifth chapter of the second volume of *The Faith of a Moralist* Taylor makes a plea for the recognition of authority in religion. He argues that whenever the church has depended exclusively or almost exclusively upon reason it has fallen into evil ways. This was the case with the “English Church of two hundred years ago,” he tells us. But the “ardent Methodist,” “the eager Evangelical,” and “the earnest Anglo-Catholic” came to recall men to the rights of authority in religion and brought new vitality to the church. To be sure, these movements were one-sided but on the whole their influence was beneficial. After expressing himself in this manner about the church of England he turns to America with these words:

⁴ A. E. Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, London, 1931, Series 2, p. 226.

We see the same thing, in a highly grotesque form, in the curious contemporary American movement which calls itself Fundamentalism. That the Fundamentalists, being for the most part extremely ill-educated, should be violently obscurantist in their attitude to natural and historical science is only what might be expected, though I doubt whether their *caeca fides* is really more obscurantist at heart than the equally blind confidence of the aggressive 'rationalist' in the competence of scientific methods, of which he most commonly knows next to nothing, to answer all questions 'in the earth, or out of it.' But it is, I should say, a mere mistake to see nothing in the Fundamentalist movement but its hostility to Darwin and Huxley and the 'higher critics' of Biblical documents. What is really back of the movement, and supplies it with its driving force, is the conviction that any attempt to eliminate absolute supernatural 'authority' from Christianity, or any other great positive religion, is destructive of its character as religion....

The real issue is not whether the opening chapters of *Genesis* are 'fundamental,' but whether there is anywhere a genuine *fundamentum*, a 'sure corner-stone,' on which positive religion can build.⁵

We have here, it might appear, a recognition of the rightful place of authority in religion. At the same time we have a firm rejection of any form of authority which binds men to an implicit acceptance of what the Scriptures teach on such matters as nature and history. Taylor is definitely of the opinion that there can be no confession of faith which contains the system of doctrine contained in the Scripture. No historically produced document, he feels, can contain a system of truth.

It is imperative that we look carefully into the reasons for Taylor's opinion on this point. In the space-time world, says Taylor, we deal with the individual entities. These individual entities can never be fully known by us. In our attempt to know these entities we must employ universals or laws. But in relating individual entities to laws we can never do more than speak of the qualities that these entities have in common with other entities. Accordingly, we can never, in any given finite period of time, have an adequate knowledge of any individual entity. There is always something that eludes us.

According to this point of view, then, we may say that no system of truth could be expressed that would fully fit the facts of the world. To understand this point we may think of the physicist. Such men as Eddington, Jeans and Bavink have all made us familiar with the fact, says Taylor, that in physics we deal with abstractions. The scientist's table is not really our table. There must, says Taylor, be a connection between the two tables, but that connection is really a matter of faith. The scientist can, in the nature of the case, deal with abstractions only. He cannot deal with individual tables. And what is true of the physicist is true of the theologian, as Taylor tells us in the following words:

Now a physicist like Professor Eddington really stands to you and me, in his utterances about human bodies, tables, suns, stars, precisely as the scientific theologian stands to the simple believer, Simon the fisherman, or another. The physicist is the systematic theologian of the natural world, that *Theos eudaimon* of Plato's *Timaeus*. The *viri Galilaei* and their lived religion set the Christian theologian his problems, as the sense-experiences of the common man normally equipped with eyes, ears, nostrils, tongue, skin, set the physicist his. There is no legitimate physical speculation which has not its point of departure in common prescientific sense-experience, and there is similarly, I take it, no legitimate theological problem which has not its point of departure in the actual life of contact with God. In this sense, the whole of legitimate theology is implicit and given once for all in the life of the man practising his religion, as the

⁵ *Idem*, 2, p. 207.

whole of physical science is implicit and, in a way, given once for all, in the actuality of the sensible.⁶

The position of the theologian is, according to Taylor, even more difficult than the position of the physicist. The theologian deals with matters that are more remote from us than the things of the physical world.⁷

We see that we are dealing here with a most fundamental question in epistemology. Taylor wants us to have the house of orthodox theology remodeled in accordance with his own fundamental principle of epistemology. According to his epistemology we deal in the facts of the universe with utterly uninterpreted facts. It is we as human beings who must by ourselves, without reference to God, interpret these facts for ourselves. But inasmuch as we cannot interpret the facts exhaustively we have to that extent no assurance that individual facts may not be quite different from what we think them to be. We may quote a passage that brings out Taylor's views on this point fully:

There always are, and always will be, loose ends, 'bare' conjunctions not understood, in all our actual natural knowledge, just because it all starts from and refers to the historical and individual, which analysis cannot exhaust. To say the same thing again in different language, it is never a conclusive argument against the reality of a fact to say that it cannot be harmonized with a known 'law of nature,' since the law, if asserted as having objective reference, only embodies our partial divination of a pattern which we never grasp in its concrete entirety. Though our formulated 'laws' are never merely 'subjective,' yet, as the history of natural science proves only too abundantly, they always contain a subjective constituent which affects them to a not precisely definable extent. Hence the fact we find so stubbornly recalcitrant may provide the very suggestion we need for introducing an illuminating correction into our 'law.'⁸

Is there then at no point an escape from uncertainty in knowledge? Suppose we turn away from the page of history entirely. Can we not find in mathematics a field where there is absolute certainty? Could we not turn to the *Principia Mathematica* of Whitehead and Russell and show that we there have a body of timeless truth? Have we not in the language of symbolic logic a universal language unaffected by differences of time and race? Taylor's answer is as follows:

For one thing, even in *Principia Mathematica*, the stereotyping of thought is not, and could not have been, complete. There are intrinsic limits to the capabilities of a 'universal symbolism.' Its not innumerable symbols for primary 'indefinables' have to be accurately apprehended before their combinations can be understood, and thus presuppose preliminary explanation in an idiom which is not dead and impersonal, but personal and living. Here is, at the outset, an opening for what may prove to be serious misunderstandings. And again, in every such symbolic system, there must be some supreme principle or principles, governing all its inferences, and these obviously cannot be expressed in the symbolism itself. Thus, every symbolically expressed demonstration in *Principia Mathematica* depends on the principle that 'what is implied by true premises' is itself true, but neither this proposition nor the meaning of the terms 'implication' and 'truth' can be expressed in the symbolism of the authors, or any other. Explanations on such points have to be given in ordinary language, and this makes it possible that the explanations may, from the first, have been confused or ambiguous, and again that they may cease to convey the sense intended, as the words employed shift their meaning 'in use.' Thus, the most rigorous system of symbolically expressed mathematical truths would not wholly escape the criticism of a resolute denier of permanence.⁹

⁶ *Idem*, 2, pp. 104 f.

⁷ *Idem*, 2, p. 106.

⁸ *Idem*, 2, pp. 172 f.

⁹ *Idem*, 2, pp. 73 f.

Personal, historical revelation implies uncertainty. That seems to be the point of Taylor's contention. If we should insist on absolutely certain and absolutely authoritative revelation we should have to have an impersonal revelation. But an impersonal revelation is no revelation.

Taylor feels that his point has a direct bearing upon the Christian religion. Christianity is anything but an impersonal religion. The revelation idea in Christianity is anything but unhistorical. Christianity is anything but a system of metaphysics for which history is a matter of indifference. And this is as it should be:

The metaphysician trying to make a fact out of categories is only repeating the task of twisting ropes out of sand imposed by Michael Scot on his friends. However cunningly you complicate category with category, the process always leaves you with something which may be, or should be, or ought to be, and, as Baron von Hugel was fond of saying, 'No amount of Ought-ness can be made to take the place of Is-ness.'¹⁰

From what has been said of Taylor's position so far, it is clear that he has been largely influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. It will help us to understand Taylor's position more fully if we note what he thinks has been the most valuable contribution made to philosophy by Kant. Taylor speaks of Kant in these words:

Whatever our agreements or disagreements with Kant, there is one lesson which we have all learned from the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that logic, functioning *in vacuo*, can tell us nothing of the course of events. No assertion about the actual course of events can be shown to be unreasonable, apart from an appeal to specific experiences, unless it is found on analysis to be internally self-contradictory, and then only, if we accept the Law of Contradiction, as a real irrationalist in metaphysics would not, as an ontological truth.¹¹

Any truth that may be offered to us is, therefore, according to Taylor, an empty concept till it is tried in actual experience. But the experience of a number of generations is history. And if we are to judge of the truth as it comes to us in history we are bound to contribute a subjective element. There is and can be no objective knowledge in the sense in which the rationalists before Kant's day thought of it.

Kant's philosophy has had a far-reaching significance for the course of Christianity in the modern world. Through his influence modern philosophers have virtually given up hope of finding a fully rational interpretation of the universe. Kant maintains that man himself supplies the universalizing element in his thinking. Accordingly, he holds, there can be no such thing as universal validity. Only that which admits of a test by experiment can be said to be binding upon all men. And even that which is now binding upon all men may be modified when new facts appear upon the horizon of knowledge. Thus, the knowledge of the world beyond the possibility of testing by experiment, that is the noumenal world, is a world about which we can have no intellectual contact with our neighbor; it is our own individual world concerning which we can prove nothing. And as for the world which does admit of testing by experiment, that is the phenomenal world, though the validity that is in it is a validity for all men, it is nevertheless merely a validity for us. That is, it is a validity which we postulate or assume in order to be able to speak together about the matters which we seem to have in common. Thus even in the phenomenal world, the only world in which there seems to be universal validity or certainty, each man really stands by himself with his knowledge. Each of us finds himself

¹⁰ *Idem*, 2, p. 136.

¹¹ *Idem*, 2, p. 152.

as much alone as Mr. Byrd found himself alone at “Advance Base” in the silence and darkness of the polar wastes. Our contact with our fellowmen, situated somewhere else in the same wastes, depends upon our own effort to keep our “gasoline-driven radio generators” going. Absolutely unique experiences come to us from utterly uncharted areas of existence but as we seek to communicate these experiences to others, we can do no more than give a few faint signals. Others may with great difficulty patch together these intermittent signals, but only if their “receiving sets” are in good condition.

In some such way we may sum up Kant’s conception of human knowledge. Taylor’s position is to all intents and purposes similar to that of Kant. He returns again and again to the notion of concrete historical fact as that which cannot be exhausted in its meaning and to the notion that we cannot fully transmit the meaning which we individually attribute to our experiences of concrete historical fact to other men. History may for Taylor be compared to the polar wastes of Mr. Byrd, and our communication of our experience of historical fact to his feeble efforts to speak with the men of “Little America.” Thus we are dealing with the subjective element in the knowledge situation. This subjective element, Taylor is deeply convinced, cannot be eliminated.

There is, according to Taylor, no escape from the subjective element in all historical appreciation even by an appeal to the person of Christ. Are we not, he reasons, to think of Christ as having a true body and a reasonable soul? If Christ was a real human being he was subject to the same limitations as other human beings. Taylor expresses his view on this point as follows: Both the soul and body of Christ are held to be, in the fullest sense of the word, ‘creatures’; the historical, human experience of Christ is thus a creaturely experience, though an absolutely unique creaturely experience, of the divine; hence the strictest traditional orthodoxy has found itself confronted with the problem of the limitation of the human knowledge of the incarnate Christ, a problem raised from the first by the simple statement of an Evangelist that, as he advanced from childhood and manhood, he ‘grew in wisdom and grace with God and man,’ by the record of his frank admission of ignorance of the day and hour of the final triumph of the divine purpose, and still more impressively by the narrative of his devastating experience of sheer dereliction at the crisis of his history, the prayer of passionate prostration in the garden, and the dying quotation from the most heart-broken of the Psalms. It is only the creaturely that can pray, and when a Christian speaks of the adequacy of the Lord’s human experience of the supernatural, he must not, I take it, forget that the adequacy meant is still relative to the conditions of creatureliness inseparable from genuine humanity. The human experience even of a humanity ‘personally united with the World,’ being human, is still temporal experience of the supra-temporal, and of it, too, it must hold true that *quidquid recipitur, recipitur ad modum recipientis*. If it were not so, Christian theology would have no obstinate Christological problem to wrestle with.¹²

We would seem here to have come to the bottom of the matter as far as the question of the actuality and possibility of an absolutely authoritative revelation in history is concerned. Even Christ, the Son of God, says Taylor, inasmuch as he was truly man, could not give us such a revelation.

Taylor would advise orthodox believers to put the matter of revelation on a somewhat lower basis. If we would only realize that in the question of revelation we are dealing with concrete historical facts which can never be fully interpreted, we would not try the impossible and make ourselves the laughing-stock of the world. Says he: The words of Scripture are inerrant, but we may disagree about the canon, or allow for unlimited corruption in transcription, or may take strange liberties of interpretation. The actual words of the

¹² *Idem*, 2, pp. 229 f.

Lord are beyond question, but He may be credited with a double meaning, or a recorded utterance may be shown to have suffered from imperfect rendering out of Aramaic into Greek, or to have been misunderstood from unfamiliarity with Galilean tradition, or to have undergone ‘development,’ whenever it suits our convenience. All transparent subterfuges by which our absolute authority is nominally respected, while in fact we trim its deliverances to suit our changing fancy. It is an old story over which the world has made merry until it is ashamed of its own jest.¹³

If we should adopt a lower position, says Taylor, we should remove the great “*scandalum*” from the notion of revelation and make it acceptable to reason. The notion of an absolute revelation would be tantamount to the notion of a mystery essentially insoluble to the mind of man. But the mind of man can not allow that there are matters that are in principle mysterious to it. We quote his words again:

Now, I own that it is just this recognition of the principle of absolute authority, in one form or another, which is, in the end, the *scandalum* offered by all positive and historical religions to the philosophical mind, honestly bent on the understanding of things. The mysterious always presents a problem to intelligence, and the intellect would be playing the traitor to itself if it merely sat down idly in the presence of the problem without any serious effort to grapple with it.¹⁴

Here Taylor is applying the “scientific method” to the question of revelation. In fact, he is using the “scientific method” throughout his work. With all of Taylor’s emphasis upon the necessity of allowing for the mysterious, he plainly says that he can allow for nothing that is not in principle penetrable to the human mind. The “scientific method” implies the notion of absolute comprehension in knowledge. Following Kant’s advice it holds to this notion merely as a limiting concept. It admits that it never expects, in any given finite period of time, to give an exhaustive interpretation of the facts of life. This, however, does not alter the fact that for the “scientific method” no fact can really be allowed as a fact that has significance unless it is essentially penetrable to the human mind.

This idea of the essential penetrability to the human mind of any reality that we are to admit as having determinative significance for our lives implies that we, as human beings, are to be our own ultimate judges. Not as though each individual man must directly be his own judge with respect to what he will accept and with respect to what he will reject by way of religious belief. Each individual man may listen to the “experts” in religion and ask them for their judgment as to what they think is best for him. To this notion of the expert in religious matters Taylor accords great prominence. Only such a concept of revelation as the expert in religion will allow is acceptable.

Taylor’s expert has had a great deal of experience with religious matters. He, himself, says Taylor, must be a religious man. He cannot be an expert in religion if he has no more than a mere intellectual interest in religion. If he had nothing but a mere intellectual interest in religion he would be like a blind man circularising his seeing friends.¹⁵ He must, therefore, be a man of genuine religious intuition.¹⁶ He must have a native ability for the appreciation of religious matters as an artist must have a native ability for the appreciation of artistic matters. A true expert does not, however, depend too largely upon his own individual intuition but goes to school with the great men of religion in the past.

¹³ *Idem*, 2, pp. 210 f.

¹⁴ *Idem*, 2, pp. 208 f.

¹⁵ *Idem*, 1, p. 18.

¹⁶ *Idem*, 2, p. 147.

Thus he really has the benefit of the consensus of the great multitude of the spiritually minded.¹⁷ The expert in religion has an even more responsible task to perform than the expert in other fields. In other fields, the common man seems to be quite normal, but in religion, as in art, we need a good deal of training before we are able to appreciate fully that which is highest and noblest. There are the spiritually blind, the myopic and the clear-sighted. The clear-sighted ought to lead the rest of us to a true appreciation of that which is spiritual.

But the expert, after all, serves us only at the outset of our investigation. It is we ourselves who must finally decide whether a religion is acceptable. How can we do this? From history we may learn whether or not a religion has been spiritually beneficial. In the same way, it is reasonable to recognize that if the great religious tradition has ennobled and purified human life, over a wide range of space and time and circumstance, by bringing the supernatural down into it, and is actually, so far as we have been able to assimilate its content, doing the same thing for our own lives, what has been intensely perceived and lived by the chosen spirits who have shaped the tradition, even where we have not been personally able to assimilate it and build it into the substance of our own lives, is no mere 'subjective' illusion, but embodies real apprehension of a real supernatural.¹⁸

Thus by following expert advice but finally by using our own judgment as to what is spiritually profitable to us we are to judge of the truth of various religions. Their truth depends upon the spiritual value we think they have for us.

When we apply this standard we may find that there is no religion that can be called absolutely true. In fact this is bound to be the case. No historical religion can legitimately claim absolute truth for itself because, as noted before, it is based upon the apprehension of historical facts, which, in the nature of the case, do not admit of exhaustive analysis. We are compelled, therefore, to put the claim for Christianity as a whole on a somewhat lower but more truthful level. These views Taylor expresses as follows:

The real antithesis is not between one religion which is true and a plurality of others which are simply false, but between a religion—if there is one—which is the whole truth, *ad modum recipientis*, about man's relations with God, and others which are partial and infected with error, because they do not, in the poet's phrase, look at the Lord 'all at once.'¹⁹

We have now seen that Taylor's concept of "concrete historical fact," which, as he contends, can never be fully analyzed and can therefore never have its full meaning communicated, together with his notion of the essential penetrability of all significant reality to the mind of man, implies, as he rightly insists, a modification of the orthodox notion of revelation and even of Christianity as a whole. Taylor sets forth in great detail the changes that would have to be made in orthodox theology, if his principles were to be accepted. It will not be feasible to follow him in all this. There is one point, however, in which the significance of his view stands forth with striking clarity. It is in his discussion of miracle. We limit ourselves, therefore, to a brief discussion of Taylor's views on this subject.

Taylor seems, at first glance, to be very sympathetic to the notion of miracle. He argues that there is no *a priori* objection against the possibility of miracle. There is, he thinks, even a presumption in favor of the idea of miracle as there is a presumption in

¹⁷ *Idem*, 2, p. 145.

¹⁸ *Idem*, 2, p. 223.

¹⁹ *Idem*, 2, pp. 95 f.

favor of the idea of revelation. This temporal world seems not to have a full principle of interpretation within itself. It seems to need a super-temporal world in relation to which it may be explained. It is therefore unlikely that the eternal world should leave itself without a witness in the temporal world. There is likely to be a “pervasion of the sensible by the supra-sensible.” And this pervasion may be irruptive as well as constant.²⁰ Wellington is said to have been surprised that Napoleon had no “surprises” for him at Waterloo. So we should be surprised if there were no irruptive influences from the eternal into the temporal. “There is a real element of the ‘irruptive’ and incalculable about the relation of human purpose and intelligence to the ‘routine’ of events, and by analogy, we might expect the divine purpose behind history, if it really exists, to display the same quality.”²¹ Something uncomfortably like miracle confronts us everywhere. Emergent evolutionists really admit this. We cannot determine the course of the future by any analysis of the present.²² And if it is hard for us to understand natural miracles we all recognize moral miracles. “Yet, when all is said, familiar routine is not more intrusively broken by the surprising events recorded, for example, in the Gospels than by the abrupt appearance of high poetical genius in the youthful Shelley with his antecedent record of commonplace ancestry and particularly worthless adolescent verses, or the youthful Keats, ...”²³ And if we are bound to recognize such moral miracles we should be ready to recognize the idea of nature miracles. There are no two watertight compartments of existence, one mental and the other physical. In all our knowledge of the physical, the mental has a part. Thus there is good analogy for nature miracles.²⁴

This “defense” of the idea of miracles offered by Taylor is really a thorough rejection of miracles in the Biblical sense of the term. For Taylor, miracle is simply a strange event which the mind of man has so far been unable to explain. Taylor’s concept of miracle is implied in, and is an expression of, his concept of reality as consisting ultimately of brute facts that are utterly uninterpreted till the mind of man begins its work. Taylor would no doubt agree with the views of William Adams Brown on the subject. For Brown the idea of miracle is a correlate of the idea of personality. Within an essentially personalistic interpretation of the universe one must leave room for surprise. But this does not mean that one must leave room for the orthodox concept of miracle. The orthodox concept of miracle, argues Brown, implies that reality is not essentially penetrable to the mind of man. Even if we granted that the gospel records are to be taken as reporting nothing but what really took place in the phenomenal world, it would not follow that a miracle, as Calvin or Aquinas thought of miracle, took place. Says Brown: “But the one thing which you have not shown, which indeed you cannot show, is that a miracle has happened; for that is to confess that these problems are inherently insoluble, which cannot be determined until all possible tests have been made.”²⁵

On the one hand, the idea of miracle for Taylor, as for Brown, implies that we as human beings face reality as something that is not yet fully interpreted. We face concrete

²⁰ *Idem*, 2, p. 162.

²¹ *Idem*, 2, p. 165.

²² *Idem*, 2, p. 166.

²³ *Idem*, 2, p. 168.

²⁴ *Idem*, 2, p. 169.

²⁵ William Adams Brown, *God at Work*, 1933, p. 170.

facts which can never be fully rationalized. And this means that we really face brute facts. On the other hand for Taylor, as for Brown, the idea of any reality that is not essentially penetrable to the human mind cannot be allowed. To the section in which Taylor vindicates the notion of miracle as he understands it, he adds the following words: To admit this is not to say that reality is ultimately irrational, nor to blink the fact that, on any theory, the great majority of narratives of alleged miracles are thoroughly untrustworthy. When we say that the world of the historical is rational and that its rationality is a postulate of sane philosophy, all that we have a right to mean is that this world has a definite pattern which connects its parts in a thoroughgoing unity.²⁶

At a later point in the argument of his book he speaks of the same question of the relation of fact to rationality in the following words:

But the point on which I am personally most concerned to insist is a different one. It is that in immediate apprehension of the supernatural, as in immediate apprehension of the natural, we are dealing with concrete, individual, historical, experiences which resist complete intellectual analysis at the same time that they demand it.²⁷

In an effort to evaluate Taylor's philosophy as a whole in its relation to Christian theism we must ask Taylor to justify to us his theory of knowledge and his theory of reality as it has come to expression in the question of the relation of brute facts to the principle of interpretation. It is his conception of fact as utterly uninterpreted fact and his conception of the essential penetrability to the mind of man of all the reality with which we need be concerned, that lies at the bottom of his rejection of the orthodox Christian conception of religion. We have watched Taylor's expert architect remodel the house of orthodox theology beyond recognition. He has not left one stone unturned. This was only natural. Grant Taylor's notion of brute fact and the notion that man must be his own ultimate interpreter, involved as it is in the notion of brute fact, and nothing could remain of the teachings of orthodox Christianity. Orthodox Christianity begins the formulation of its doctrines upon the presupposition that all facts in the universe have been from all eternity interpreted by God. When man faces the facts of this universe he does not face absolutely brute facts. To be sure, facts may be, and many of them are, unknown to him. Accordingly he may and must, in his scientific investigation, posit various hypotheses with respect to these facts. But this does not mean that at the outset of his investigation any hypothesis is theoretically as good as any other. No hypothesis is admissible that would introvert the basic presupposition of God as the complete and original interpreter of the universe. Nor is any hypothesis admissible that presupposes the essential penetrability of God to the mind of man.

Taylor's notion of the rationality of history as being a limiting concept based only upon the practical reason is thus seen to be radically opposed to the Christian notion of the absolute rationality of all that exists. The orthodox Christian takes the notion of the rationality of the real as a constitutive concept. For him the notion of the absolute rationality of all being is the presupposition of all his efforts at interpretation. For Taylor the notion of rationality for man must be adjusted to the notion of an ultimate irrationality. Ultimate irrationality is involved in his notion of brute fact.

To put the matter somewhat differently, we may say that for Christian theism, the theism of the Scriptures, mystery surrounds man only, whereas for the theism of Taylor

²⁶ Taylor, *The Faith of a Moralist*, 2, p. 170.

²⁷ *Idem*, 2, pp. 223 f.

mystery surrounds both God and man. Taylor's God faces brute facts which he must gradually interpret to himself. In this respect Taylor's God has no advantage over man. Both God and man, according to Taylor, face a situation that is independent of themselves. This has become apparent from the quotations we have given. In them the notion of absolutely brute fact appears again and again. If Taylor really meant to make a basic difference between the knowledge God has of facts and the knowledge man has of facts he could not have spoken of man's knowledge of facts as he does. If the facts which face man are already interpreted by God man need not and cannot face them as brute facts. If the facts which man faces are really God-interpreted facts, man's interpretation will have to be, in the last analysis, a re-interpretation of God's interpretation. Thus we find that for Taylor God is really in no better position than man; both face the ultimately mysterious.

Taylor has shown himself to be committed to the idealistic theory of judgment. He has repeatedly insisted that the interpretive function of the knower is presupposed even for the recognition of any fact, not to speak of a related group of facts. In this way he has sought to oppose all naturalistic and humanistic theories of religion based on a pragmatist philosophy. We may appreciate the effort but are compelled to note its failure. The God of Taylor is not radically different from the God of John Dewey. Both Gods face brute facts. Both Gods are therefore finite.

The idealist theory of judgment, as noted, brings God face to face with brute facts, as it brings man face to face with brute facts. Accordingly, man's knowledge cannot be thought of as analogical of God's knowledge. Taylor does, to be sure, speak of "the great Aristotelian conception of the 'analogous' use of predicates."²⁸ He warns us against introducing "the distinction between the possible and the actual into that which we also recognize as the foundation of both possibility and actuality."²⁹ Thus it might appear as though Taylor really holds to the doctrine of a self-sufficient God. And thus it might appear that for Taylor man's knowledge would have to be analogical of God's knowledge. Yet this is not really the case. Man's knowledge of facts is, for Taylor, not basically dependent upon God's knowledge of these facts. Man is not really thought of as a creature of God. The idea of creation is regarded at most as a limiting concept. Thus, in the final analysis, God himself is reduced to a principle of rationality within the universe.

The important question to be answered finally is whether Taylor's objection to historic Christianity with its claim to absolute finality is basically valid. Taylor's theism and Taylor's Christianity may be different from the theism and Christianity of the orthodox faith and yet be the only theism and the only Christianity that intelligent men, particularly men of science, can accept.

The question at issue here is not, in the final analysis, one of certain facts only but is one of the philosophy of fact itself. The question is whether upon Taylor's presuppositions human speech and behavior have meaning. The question is as to the presuppositions which are to make human predication possible. On this point we would urge that upon the presuppositions of Taylor's philosophy human intelligence itself becomes meaningless. If the human mind is ultimately face to face with brute fact and if God himself is ultimately face to face with brute fact, as he must be if we are to admit the

²⁸ *Idem*, 1, p. 52.

²⁹ *Idem*, 1, p. 245.

force of Taylor's main argument, there cannot be any knowledge of any fact. If rationality does not come into the knowledge picture at the lowest level of cognizance it cannot come in afterwards. It would be impossible to recognize any one fact and distinguish it from other facts unless we may presuppose a universal relationship between them. Taylor has not made provision in his thought for a genuine union between the "one" and the "many."

Put in somewhat different fashion, our criticism of Taylor's position is that if we accept his philosophy we should all be in a position similar to that in which Mr. Byrd found himself at "Advance Base." Even so, we should have to think of him without such radio facilities as he had. Or rather, we should even have to think away Mr. Byrd himself and think of dark wastes by themselves. We should then have the night in which all cows are black. Thus we feel compelled to urge that Taylor has been unable to reach the goal he has set for himself. Taylor has tried nobly to bring "actuality and value" into harmony with one another. Yet he has not been able to do so. He who allows for brute fact has adopted into his thinking an eternal dualism between the universals and particulars of our experience. That which Taylor, and the idealists in general, are most anxious to reach, namely, a "concrete universal" which shall furnish a genuine unity between particulars and universals, they are, we are compelled to maintain, unable to reach. Such a concrete universal cannot be reached; it must be presupposed.

What Taylor has been striving to reach a consistent orthodox Christianity has constantly possessed. A consistent orthodox Christianity teaches that God is a self-sufficient Being. In God actuality and value are identical. He does not need a "non-being" over against himself in terms of which he may learn to know himself. Neither beyond him nor within his being is there a "given" element. He is pure affirmation without correlative negation. The triune God speaks to himself; the three persons of the Trinity are eternally exhaustive of one another. Accordingly man, when freely made by God's creative will, is dependent, for his interpretation of all facts that he meets, upon the prior interpretation of these facts by the triune God. Man may thus rest assured that his researches in the realm of fact will not be in vain God has pre-interpreted "whatsoever comes to pass." God exists; therefore, man can know and live. The Christian theism of the Scriptures thus appears to be the only position that does not reduce intelligence and action to an absurdity.

Philosophic Foundations¹

1

Philosophic Foundations is a book worthy of careful study. The author is a man of philosophical insight and erudition. He has a definite philosophical principle in accord with which he interprets reality. By the help of his philosophy Mr. Thomas desires to bring men “to the gates of the gospel.”

Mr. Thomas writes in the spirit of one who is deeply convinced of the truth of his position and of the crying need of such a philosophy as he presents. In an address delivered after the publication of his book he says: “I saw that the freedom of the Absolute Spirit must be as absolute as His Rational essence. I know it was a daring step to take, but further philosophic investigation has convinced me of its fundamental necessity and truth. I set idealism afresh on the way of development by affirming the absolute freedom of the Absolute Spirit as the second foundation-stone of the New Philosophy. I know that such a fundamental revolution as this in Philosophy will startle many minds, and will surely meet with all possible criticism and opposition from the sponsors of modern scepticism; but I have found it shed such amazing light upon the problems of the universe that I am convinced that it, or some philosophy closely akin to it, will shape the thoughts of the philosophic future.”² The author, though speaking of his philosophy as a new philosophy, is perfectly frank to admit that he follows the idealist tradition. He speaks with great appreciation of Plato and Hegel while yet he departs appreciably from the latter’s dialectical method and “determinist” conclusions. He seems to have profited greatly from the recent development in British idealist philosophy represented by such men as Pringle-Pattison, James Ward, Clement C. J. Webb, Hastings Rashdall and others, though he does not mention them. With them he sets aside the “block universe” of Hegel and the more absolute idealists like F. H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet. By asserting the “absolute freedom of the Absolute Spirit” Thomas feels he has laid the true foundation for life and all its manifestations.

To catch the spirit of the book under discussion we must first note its great emphasis upon reason, and the place assigned to it. Mr. Thomas is careful to emphasize from time to time that he has reached his philosophical conclusions quite independently of Scripture. In the address mentioned above he says: “The revelation of Holy Scripture is *sui generis*, and every reasonable man must admit that outside of that revelation God has allowed and arranged a wide field of truth for the investigation of the human mind.”³ Or again: “The conclusion from all I have said is this: While Divine Revelation has its own special range, the quest of mind has also an appointed range of its own, and this quest in a true Philosophy is in necessary and vital alliance with true religion and its Divine Revelation. There is a true Philosophy of being, whether we have discovered it or not, on which all the truths of life, from the lowest to the highest, must be based, and with which

¹ *Philosophic Foundations*. By John Thomas, M.A. (Westminster City Publishing Co., Ltd., 94 Clapham Park Road, London, S. W.4.).

² *The Spiritual Nature and Constitution of the Universe*. Reprinted from *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, Vol. 71., p. 67.

³ *Idem*, p. 61.

they must be in harmony. It is on these foundations of universal reason that all the heavens rest, and truth towers upwards into its highest Divine revelation.”⁴

These quotations already suggest to us a difficulty that we meet again and again in the philosophy of Mr. Thomas. We are told that philosophy and Revelation each have an area of investigation of their own. On the other hand it is evident that his philosophy covers the whole of reality in its quest. “All the truths of life” must be based on this philosophy and be in accord with it. Is it clear that on such a basis there is really no room left for Revelation at all?

At any rate Scriptural revelation, such as Christianity holds to, seems to us to be at variance with the conception of Reason entertained by Mr. Thomas. Scriptural revelation itself brings to us what for the moment we may call a “philosophy of being,” an interpretation of the whole of life. Scripture offers a “life and world view.” It says something very distinctive and significant about what is often spoken of as the domain of philosophy and the domain of science. The “facts” of the scientist are, according to Scripture, created by God. They fit into the plan of God. They are therefore God-structured. God works all things after the counsel of his will. Scripture is specific on this point. There are no “brute facts” i.e., facts uninterpreted by God as well as by man. We may even say that it is God’s interpretation that is epistemologically prior to the existence of any fact in the universe.

To this something must be added with respect to the mind of man. Of this, too, Scripture says something specific. In the first place Scripture says that man’s mind is a created mind. This is of basic importance. A philosophy that recognizes the created character of the human mind is one kind of philosophy; a philosophy that denies or ignores the created character of the human mind is another kind of philosophy. The two cannot walk together. A created mind recognizes or ought to recognize the fact that the Creator’s thoughts are high above its own thoughts. Isaiah speaks of this. Thus there is a Christian Irrationalism that is not only consistent with but the necessary implicate of the ultimate Rationality, that is God and his plan. Man must think God’s thoughts after him as far as it is possible for a creature to do so. But man can see only the beginning of God’s ways. By his intellectual efforts man must seek to bring as much coherence into his experience as he can. In doing so he must presuppose the Absolute Coherence that is in God. In God’s light man sees the light. But man must not presume to be as God. He must allow for that which to him is new before him and out of reach above him simply because in the nature of the case he cannot fathom the thought of God. God is and must be incomprehensible to man. Not as though God is a limiting concept for man, a concept which will always recede as does the horizon but which he may legitimately seek to exhaust. God as the ultimate self-contained absolute rationality must reveal himself spontaneously before man can know aught of him. True, in creating man God has already revealed himself to some extent. But even so, as Scripture tells us in its very beginning, God planned to have man know much more of himself than he could naturally know from the fact of his creation in the image of God. If then man seeks for coherence in his experience he should always realize that his coherence, though, to be sure, analogical of God’s internal coherence and therefore basically true, can yet be no more than analogical coherence.

⁴ *Idem*, p. 62.

This implies therefore (a) that a Christian is in the nature of the case utterly opposed to all forms of Irrationalism and (b) that a Christian is in the nature of the case utterly opposed to all forms of Rationalism. With respect to the first point we can rejoice in the effort of Mr. Thomas to oppose Barthianism. With respect to the second point, however, we are bound to maintain that he has been insufficiently critical of idealist philosophy. To be sufficiently critical of idealist philosophy is to reject its basic interpretative principle. Idealist philosophy speaks simply of Reason without making a genuine distinction between divine reason and human reason. I do not say that idealism makes no distinction at all between human and divine reason. It makes a distinction, to be sure, but merely a quantitative one. At bottom all Reason, divine, no less than human, is, for idealism, confronted with utterly brute fact. Plato worried about “unthought thoughts” about a “something” that stood in a manner of independence over against God and in terms of correlativity with which God had to be defined. And even Hegel, though he honored the Absolute as a limiting concept and sometimes speaks as though by his formula, the Real is the Rational and the Rational is the Real and he has slain the spectre of brute fact, none the less equates Being and non-Being at the beginning of his philosophy. Accordingly his dialectical method, itself born of illegitimate correlativity between bare potentiality and equally bare actuality passes on beyond God. Thus all forms of Rationalism, and, we may add, all forms of historic idealism are really irrationalistic at the core. Thus Rationalism is but a stepping-stone to Irrationalism.

Mr. Thomas is basically right, we believe, in saying that in Christianity we have a philosophy of the Absolute Spirit and therefore a philosophy of Absolute Rationality. In its notion of the self-contained ontological Trinity there is given us a Concrete Universal. In it unity and diversity are mutually exhaustive of one another. Thus, as Mr. Thomas says so well, there is within the Godhead a self-sufficient intercommunication. “The Christian conception of God is that, in His own Absolute and Infinite Personality He must be conceived as completely independent of the Finite creation. If we could conceive of the whole creation as being dissolved and swept into nothingness, the Infinite Spirit would abide in the unassailable and undiminished perfection and glory of His own Absoluteness” (p. 28). Or again: “In Philosophy itself, to face the truth with complete sincerity and simplicity, we must accept the idea of Infinite or limitative definitions, for even the profoundest metaphysic must condescend to accept terms and phrases in their patent meanings—the meanings which they convey to the general intelligence of Man” (p. 28). If he had boldly maintained this fundamental contention in his book, Mr. Thomas would have cut himself loose completely from the idealist principle of interpretation. Idealist philosophy, in assuming that it may rightfully speak of Reason without reference to the creation idea, in assuming that “all possible experience” is essentially on one level, thereby makes God correlative to man. He who builds his philosophy on the uncritical assumption of the essential oneness in ontological status of divine and human reason, must, if he is not to lose himself in a formal identity philosophy, eventually confront God, no less than man, with brute fact and thus reduce God himself to an abstract principle of unity that is somehow to string into unity equally abstract non-intelligible particularities. Mr. Thomas, in spite of his best intentions to defend a truly rational philosophy and in spite of his best intentions to defend the doctrine of a God who is really Absolute, has been compelled by the force of his adopted principle of interpretation to fall into a species of Irrationalism and to make his God interdependent with the universe.

It is with reluctance that we make this basic criticism. But if we are ever to have a truly “evangelical philosophy,” a philosophy calculated to bring unity of thought to the Christian student’s mind, a philosophy that shall really challenge the mind of those we as Christians are seeking to win, we must needs be clear on our basic principle of interpretation. That basic principle of interpretation, there is no help for it, we must simply and frankly take from Scripture. It is nowhere else to be found. If sin had not come into the world this would be otherwise. Then man would, of his own accord, wish to interpret the whole of his experience in terms of the self-contained ontological Trinity. He would then wish to think God’s thoughts after him. As it is, the sinner seeks to do the opposite. Born and conceived in sin as he is, he prostrates his intellectual efforts to the justification of his self-assumed autonomy. The natural man—on this, too, Scripture appears to be plain enough—hates God in the inmost core of his being. Even if by God’s restraining grace he is far from being in the manifestation of his personality as bad as he might be and one day will be, this does not change the fact that underneath all of the efforts of the natural man there is hatred of God. He has “worshipped and served” the creature rather than the Creator.

It is accordingly not too severe a stricture on non-Christian systems of philosophy to say that underneath them all there is the sinner’s effort at self-justification of his declaration of independence from God. The sinner is so utterly powerless in the vice of sin that he cannot of himself really attempt to interpret experience in terms of God. For him to do so would be to deny himself as a sinner. It is by grace alone that men can be saved from their never-ending efforts at interpreting life as ultimate autonomous interpreters instead of as derivative reinterpreters. It is therefore the frank acceptance of the Bible as the Voice of the Absolute and the acceptance of the regeneration of the mind of man which enables one truly to recognize the God which Mr. Thomas says a true philosophy requires. It appears to be quite impossible to divide experience into two domains, one of which is to be interpreted by reason and the other by revelation. Reason in the sense of man’s ratiocinative powers must always and everywhere be used. But Reason as an epistemological principle is a fiction and a snare. There is no escape from the simple alternative that faces every man. He may either interpret all of the universe, himself included, in terms of God, or he may interpret all of the universe, himself included, in terms of himself. If he does the former he does so because he has by the Holy Spirit’s illuminating power accepted Scripture as God’s revelation. If he does the latter he does so because he persists in holding, whether psychologically conscious of the fact or not, two false assumptions, namely: (a) that he is not a sinner and (b) that he is not created by God. These two are naturally involved in one another. The sinner may speak in exalted phraseology of Reason and of his desire to follow Reason fearlessly; what he really means, according to the basic principle of his being, is, that he will seek to interpret life as an ultimate interpreter who faces a universe utterly non-structural in nature till he comes with his categories bringing order into chaos.

2

Before seeking to substantiate our main criticism of the book under discussion we would briefly examine one objection that has constantly been raised to the position we have taken on the relation of Scripture and human reason. Mr. Thomas himself really

voices the objection we have in mind when he says: "It was through the truths which God has placed within the reach of human reason that Paul introduced the message of the Gospel to the Athenian idolators. He told them that God has so arranged the scheme of things that men might 'seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him; though he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being. As certain even of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring,' It was by this clear journey of the rational mind that Paul led the Athenians to the gates of the gospel, and some of them entered in, and found life."⁵ To this he adds some familiar passages from the first section of Romans.

A careful exegesis of what Paul says in Romans and elsewhere does, however, not require us to reject the plain teachings of Scripture we have brought forward. For it should be clearly noted that if Paul meant to teach in the first section of Romans that the "natural man" can by the exercise of that *principium* of interpretation which alone as a natural man he honors, be led to the "gates of the gospel" he would have to contradict what he so plainly teaches, in Romans as elsewhere, that the natural man is at enmity against God and cannot discern the things of God. For Paul to ask men to find God by the exercise of their Reason according to their assumed principle of interpretation would be for him to ask them to find a finite God. All so-called "theistic proofs" built up on the basis of the natural man's use of "Reason" have, as a matter of historical fact, led to a finite God. The "clear journey of the rational mind" could never lead men to the "gates of the gospel." What Paul did was not to recognize and honor the natural man's principle of interpretation but to challenge it. He told the Romans what they should have known had they rightly interpreted nature. He told them that the Revelation of God was all about and even immediately within them, rendering them without excuse. He further told them, that as a matter of fact, none of them had truly interpreted experience. All of them as Calvin, following Paul, says of the "divine Plato" have lost themselves in their round globe. All of them have given exclusively immanentistic interpretations of reality. Paul seeks to bring men to the gates of the gospel and seeks to have them enter these gates by asking them to make a Copernican revolution. They are asked to worship and serve the Creator instead of the creature as they have formerly done. He points out to them that unless they interpret life on a new and radically different principle they are lost. He places himself upon their position, not really, but for argument's sake, and points out to them that unless they accept the new principle they are lost. His argument in Romans is not inconsistent with his challenge in First Corinthians: "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For seeing that in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom knew not God, it was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."

If it be said that we must be on common ground with those we seek to win for Christ we would reply that if we were really on common ground with them we should together be lost. The blind cannot lead the blind. And if it be said that then reasoning with men is of as little use as a display of colors would be in the valley of the blind, we reply that Jesus made the blind to see and the deaf to hear. He spoke to Lazarus in the tomb. Did he place himself on common ground with Lazarus? And if he did not, was there no purpose in his speaking to him? Jesus gave Lazarus life, as he spake to him. Thus, if only we

⁵ *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute*, Vol. 71, p. 62.

speak in the name and by the authority of our Sender, we may reason with men, preach to men, in short make every form of appeal to men, confident that in the ways above our understanding, the Holy Spirit will enlighten them so that they may see and accept the truth.

Only thus, it seems to us, can we avoid perplexing “embranglements” with any and every form of non-Christian philosophy. We do not say that non-Christian philosophy is absolutely wrong in every sense. Just as men are restrained by God’s “common grace” from running into the consummation of wickedness the principle of which is in them, so they may set forth many things that are far from fully wrong in every respect. We dare even say that they can produce that which is “good.” Even Satan does much “good” in the world. Through his efforts to the contrary God’s grace and general virtues are set before the eyes of men in ever greater splendor. Any God-made mind, operating on the material of God’s universe, is bound to help display the truth. Accordingly we as Christians may do what Solomon did when he built the temple of God. He had skilled artisans, not partakers of the covenant, prepare material for him. So we, as long as we ourselves assume the responsibility of the architect, can use much of that which an idealist or even a pragmatist philosophy has said.

When first we take hold of the book of Mr. Thomas we might be encouraged to think that it is along such lines as these that he plans to develop his philosophy. We have already quoted his excellent statement about the doctrine of God. We are to have an absolute Spirit “without qualification or limitative definitions.” The transcendence of God is said to be “as necessary a metaphysical idea” as his immanence. Against Hegel’s “block universe” he insists on the freedom and independence of God. Says he: “Since this ordered universe has therefore only a relative and dependent existence, it is useless and unphilosophical to attempt to find the absolute within its dependency, as Hegel seems to have done by his evolving scheme of metaphysical logic; for the Absolute cannot be reached from below, but must be immediately apprehended from above.”⁶

It soon appears, however, that Mr. Thomas is evolving his Absolute “from below.” Following the idealist traditions he fails to do justice to the Biblical truths of creation and the fall in the assumptions he makes with respect to Reason. Nowhere in his book does he speak in the Biblical sense of created and sinful reason as over against uncreated and perfect Reason. True, Mr. Thomas makes a distinction between finite and Infinite Reason, but the distinction is patterned after the idealism of J. Caird. Speaking of the finite mind he says: “It is conscious of the Infinite, both in the measureless possibilities of its advance and in the mental equipment of universal Ideas through which this advance is achieved. But it is also conscious of vast limitation in its powers and achievements, and of an encompassing Universe of Infinity which it must for ever explore, and can never exhaust. In this way the Human Mind and the Infinite Mind in and through which it realizes itself are fundamentally and for ever distinguished from one another.”⁷ All this seems sufficiently specific for us to feel that in it the Biblical distinction between Creator and creature is before us and that the absolute God is really “presupposed.” The fact of man’s limitation may simply mean what in fact it does mean to many philosophers and scientists, namely, that there is an utterly uncharted realm of non-structured existence as a

⁶ p. 101.

⁷ p. 20.

primeval forest for man to explore. The question is whether God too is in the woods surrounded by a still larger and ever expanding universe of brute fact. If God is also roaming in the primeval he may be ever so mighty a hunter and ever so far ahead of man, but he is not essentially different from man. The mind of a great scientist may be far ahead of me as I seek to make a few experiments of my own, but after all we are fellow men surrounded by the uninterpreted. I may be well-advised to take note of what, coming before me, and with far greater capacity than I have, God has already explored, but my interpretation need not be and cannot be a reinterpretation of his. He is not my Creator nor the Creator of the facts I seek to know.

But have we not seen that Mr. Thomas insists strongly on the necessity of believing in a really absolute God? We have, but we are disheartened when he virtually identifies his God with Plato's God. When he has told us that the Absolute "must be immediately apprehended from above" he adds in the immediate context: "There can scarcely be any doubt that the Absolute was thus conceived by the mighty mind of Plato, when he set as the foundation of all Reality the 'Idea of the Good,' that is, of the philosophically good, the Absolute Potentiality of all that is true and beautiful. This 'Idea' was transcendent, distinguished from the 'Ideas' impressed upon the objects of the phenomenal world. It was the Absolute of Rational Intuition, abiding in its own eternal glory."⁸ We are not concerned here with the contention that the Absolute must be reached by intuition rather than by the intellect in order to be seen "from above." We are concerned merely with the nature of the Absolute itself. And on that score it is, we believe, highly confusing to speak as though Plato's theism and Biblical theism were virtually identical. Whether we take the "Good" or the God of Plato, both were confronted with brute Irrationality. Neither can with fairness be said to be absolute as the God of the Christian faith is absolute.

Speaking of his conclusions that the Absolute God must be transcendent, Mr. Thomas says: "There is nothing disappointing or strange or surprising in this, for Reason is the ultimate authority in all knowledge, and we can never go behind or beyond it. Since it is valid as the active agent in knowledge, it must be valid also in presenting and conceiving the Absolute after its own image."⁹ Thus Mr. Thomas has arrived at his virtual identification of the Absolute of Plato with the Absolute of Christianity by working "from below." It is to contradict the idea of creation when he says: "It is in the pure self-conscious Reason of Man, raised to Infinity by the operations of the same Reason, that we must seek to find the nature of the transcendent Absolute."¹⁰ It is this sort of thing that Plato and idealists after him have sought to do with the result that for them the Absolute is an abstract principle of identity that must somehow bring into unity abstract factuality. An Absolute reached "from below" is no Absolute.

There is a sense to be sure, in which we must start "from below." Psychologically we must start our process of interpretation with ourselves. We cannot escape from ourselves and jump into the being of God. But this is not the point at issue. The real question is one of epistemology and not of psychology. And in epistemology we must begin "from above." That is, we must presuppose God. Which is to say that we must take the notion of

⁸ p. 101.

⁹ p. 102.

¹⁰ p. 103.

the self-contained, self-sufficient God as the most basic notion of all our interpretative efforts. If we fail to make God epistemologically prior to ourselves we cannot fail to descend with Plato and the idealists into a final Irrationality after all.

3

We turn now to see more specifically how Mr. Thomas gradually brings down his Absolute from a self-contained eternity to dependence on the created universe. One point on which Mr. Thomas constantly dwells is that of the “freedom of the Absolute Spirit.” Summing up in the lecture referred to what he had written in his book, he says: “I saw that the freedom of the Absolute Spirit must be as Absolute as His rational essence.”¹¹ At an early point in his book this point comes to the fore: “To the Absolute Spirit, Free Volition is as fundamental as the Infinite Essence of Rational Thought. A metaphysic of Infinite Reason without Free Volition leads inevitably to the mechanical enclosure of a ‘block Universe,’ in which Man is no more than a pulse in the ticking of an Infinite Machine.”¹² A little later he adds: “The infinitely Rational Spirit is also Infinitely Free. After the vast and inevitable Rational mechanism of Hegel, such a thesis as this will startle many, but it is the only way out from the Rational ‘block house’ into the Freedom of the Universe, and is therefore unhesitatingly accepted as the Foundation of the Philosophy of this book.”¹³

We can have no possible quarrel with an insistence on the freedom of God. The question is, What is the nature of this freedom and how is it obtained? Is it identical with God’s necessary self-existence, with his absolute freedom from dependence upon anything beyond himself? We can most heartily agree with the form of statement which says that “the infinitely Rational Spirit is also infinitely Free,” but we are worried when Mr. Thomas speaks of the “Freedom of the Universe” as though it were virtually the same as the Freedom of God. By asserting the Freedom of God, Mr. Thomas argues: “The process of the Universe appears no longer as a predetermined Mechanism, but as a great and inspiring Idealism both for God and man.”¹⁴ It is perfectly apparent here that Mr. Thomas has sought for the freedom of God not by stressing his self-contained independence, but by opening up to him an area of brute fact. Nothing could destroy both the freedom and the absolute rationality of God more effectively than to speak of a “process of the Universe” as an area of adventure for God. The Biblical doctrine of God is, we believe, altogether at variance with this. God’s rationality and freedom are, according to Scripture, self-contained. This is the presupposition of that teaching which tells us that the process of the Universe is determined by God. The doctrine of the foreordination of all things in the Universe is based upon the absolute self-contained Freedom of God. To confront God with a structureless Universe is to make him dependent on that Universe. Absolute Freedom in God consists, according to Scripture, in his absolute self-confrontation in the ontological Trinity. The capitulation to the Irrational at this early point is fatal in its consequences. After this God is endowed with the

¹¹ p. 67.

¹² p. 30.

¹³ p. 31.

¹⁴ p. 35.

freedom of the Mighty Hunter in the dark Forest. The idea of God's Self-limitation is introduced as fundamental to the philosophy of the book.¹⁵ "When we pass from the Absolute to the Ordered world," says Mr. Thomas, "we speedily discern that we have passed from a Timeless and Spaceless Rational Infinity to a Universe of which the perceptions are conditioned, and hence limited, by Time and Space. Consequently it is by this Self-Limitation through Time and Space that the Absolute Spirit wills to pass into the multiplicity of a Finite Universe."¹⁶

Space and time, Mr. Thomas contends, are the "Willed Self-Limitation of the Absolute Spirit of Reason."¹⁷ Thus the "Rational Spirit of the Absolute" is "conditioned by Time and Space,"¹⁸ while "continual change is metaphysically necessary in a Universe conditioned by Time and Space."¹⁹ The Self-Limitation of God later appears to be an act of "Self-renunciation"²⁰ "so that the whole of Being can be regarded as an act or process of sacrificial love."²¹ God "adventures a Universe on the astounding basis of perfect Moral freedom."²² Thus we come to what Mr. Thomas says he is almost ready to call the "romance of the Absolute Spirit."²³ "Here," he said, "are all the materials for history *in excelsis*. Here is the free arena for the Moral battle of the Universe. Here is the complete potentiality of world-agonies and world-ecstasies. Here are fought out the issues of Being amid the din of many voices and the clash of many forces. Here the Absolute Spirit adventures all on the victorious power of the free Moral ideal. And here He Himself, the Lord of the powers of freedom, is the omnipresent Warrior in the arena of conflict. This is history indeed."²⁴ Once more he adds: "There is an element of freedom in history which cannot be bound or measured by the categories, and there is enough of irrational thinking and doing to throw all the Rational categories into confusion. History is not the production of a 'block Universe.' The history of mankind is real history, and truly belongs to the 'Universe in the making.' It is the creation of minds that are free, and are given the power of initiative because, as Rational Beings, they are also Moral Beings."²⁵

Enough has been said to prove that Mr. Thomas has sought for God's freedom by conditioning him by forms of existence not under his control. On such a basis as this Mr. Thomas is not entitled to say that "the irresistible teleological force of the Absolute Spirit" is bound to realize "the perfect end" of "this Moral 'Universe in the making.'"²⁶ First to say that there are irrational forces, forces beyond God's control, and then to say that God's teleological force is irresistible is to take back with one hand what you have

¹⁵ p. 35.

¹⁶ p. 121.

¹⁷ p. 122.

¹⁸ p. 138.

¹⁹ p. 156.

²⁰ p. 190.

²¹ p. 197.

²² p. 236.

²³ p. 236.

²⁴ p. 236.

²⁵ p. 252.

²⁶ p. 256.

given with the other. If we make the Rational and the Irrational equally ultimate correlative forces in Reality we have reached a point where we ought to abstain from further mention of the Absolute God.

The sad consequences of following the dictates of an uncritically accepted Divine-human Reason to the end appear perhaps most fully when Mr. Thomas approaches the person and work of Christ. The work of redemption is presented as really being the natural consequence of the work of creation. In creation God has given to men as the makers of history the freedom “even to be irrational.” God had to make this adventure for purposes of Self-realization.²⁷ And God is bound to succeed. So he must and does follow up creation with redemption. We quote: “But the attainment of the Moral ideal is written in the nature of the Absolute Spirit and in the purpose of creation, and it cannot fail. The Absolute Spirit cannot rest until He sees His own Moral image in the Rational Spirits He has produced. His great Self-renunciation in creation must culminate in perfect Self-realization, when Moral harmony shall be for ever complete. The passions of men must be subdued and the Moral ideal must be all in all. Either by penal judgment or by Moral attraction the Moral evil that opposes the Absolute must be destroyed.”²⁸

Our objection to all this is not that God has a unified plan and that this plan includes redemption as well as creation. Our objection is to pooling God with the Universe in order then to speak of Reason as controlling all. A truly Christian philosophy should, it seems to us, begin with the notion of God as self-contained. Then there never can be irrational forces beside him. Then creation exists really by the fiat of his will. Then creation is perfect at the outset. Creation is no adventure for God. He is not as it were taking chances with millions of little ultimate creators who are free to produce the ultimately irrational. Thus God does not need to realize himself through a huge adventure. If man sins against him, he does not need, for purposes of Self-realization, to follow up creation with salvation. When God saves men he saves them by grace. An “evangelical philosophy” should not be fundamentally inimical to the evangel. So far from leading men “to the gates of the gospel” a philosophy of abstract Reason leads, however unintentionally, to naturalistic conclusions. It is bound to trim the message of the gospel till it fits into an impersonal pattern of Rationality. The postulates of such a Reason are no doubt “imperative” but they are not “convincing.”²⁹

We deal with a major effort of interpretation in the work of Mr. Thomas. He has tried anew to make a modified form of idealist philosophy the theistic foundation of Christianity. He has made a splendid effort, but the best man cannot do the impossible. Mr. Thomas finds himself compelled to appeal from formal logic to a “unity of contradiction.”³⁰ In this he frankly follows Hegel. Life, he argues, “is far profounder and more complex than Formal Logic.”³¹ Contradictions are said to be inherent in the relation of the Infinite and Finite.³² No one need imagine for a moment, then, that Mr. Thomas pretends to offer a philosophy of Rationality in which the union of all the dimensions of

²⁷ p. 208.

²⁸ p. 261.

²⁹ p. 85.

³⁰ p. 88.

³¹ p. 273.

³² p. 273.

reality will be immediately penetrable by man's discursive intellect. It is to a higher Rationality that the appeal is made. Scarcely any serious philosopher to-day would do otherwise. That mystery out-stretches even the most penetrating efforts of man's intellect hardly a scientist or philosopher today denies. Thus we are face to face again with a simple alternative. Christian-theism really presupposes a Rationality that is higher than man can reach. It takes its position frankly on the doctrine of the self-contained Rational deity. It therefore does not believe in a union of contradictories. For God there are no unthought thoughts; he is the self-consistent ultimate Self-affirmative one who needs no correlative of irrationality in contrast with which he may define himself. Such a God is really free. Such a God it is that has freely created the world according to a rational plan which man can only in part understand. Such a God it is who alone can save by grace.

On the other hand all non-Christian philosophies, idealism no less than others, start with man. They first try to fix all reality by the pattern of formal logic. Then, driven to despair, lost in the woods of ultimate Irrationality, they resort to a logic of contradictions. Thus a philosophy of Rationality not based on the God of Scripture refutes itself by culminating in Irrationality.

If theological students are to be warned against Barthian irrationality, if science and philosophy students are to evaluate the "abstractions" of science aright, they ought to be offered a truly rational philosophy, a philosophy rational from beginning to end, the philosophy based on the God of the Christian Scriptures.

Studies In The Philosophy Of Religion

Archibald Allen Bowman: *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*. Edited with a memorial introduction by Norman Kemp Smith. London and New York: Macmillan. 1938. Two vols. 48, 423; 13, 438. \$10.50.

In his memorial introduction to the book under discussion Professor Norman Kemp Smith quotes from a letter written to him by his friend Professor Bowman to the effect that the book before us was meant to be the author's philosophical credo. A worthy philosophical credo it is and of a truly great man, whose early death is a great loss to the progress of philosophical thought. Professor Bowman was a specialist in the field of Logic and Metaphysics but he read widely in other fields. In the book before us we have the fruits of comprehensive reading and deep thought in the broad field of the philosophy of religion.

In the first two chapters of the first volume Bowman deals with the questions of starting-point and method. Our task, says Bowman, is to inquire as to the concept and the value of religion. First we look for its concept. How are we to find it? Can we find it by merely looking at the historical religions in order to see what they have in common? The answer must be in the negative. Religion is not merely "a class name for all religions and for whatever else may be brought under the term."¹ Religion has in it an ideal element. We cannot learn of this ideal element by simply observing religious phenomena. The study of religion involves, therefore, a study of the nature of reality. In a study of reality our starting-point will have to seem arbitrary to an extent. We cannot escape this. Least of all could we escape this if we should confine ourselves "to the positive methods of history and anthropology."² "What matters is not so much how or where we begin, but whether, once we have brought our inquiry to an end, it will be found that the resulting concept of religion is such as, all things considered, we had a right to expect."³

It appears then that it is no easy matter to find the concept of religion. We are not simply to amass facts but also to evaluate them. We are able to judge which facts that present themselves as religious are, and which are not, relevant.⁴ We must know how to use the evidence. We shall be compelled to make distinctions. We must do this by seeking significant contrasts.⁵ "The crucial question, therefore, seems to be not only what the facts are, but what we are to make of them once they are known."⁶

This brings us to the question of the criterion by which we are to judge matters of religion. Can we find in the "primitive as such" a reliable criterion by which to estimate what is truly religious?⁷ To what extent are chronological considerations to be adduced at

¹ 1, p. 7.

² 1, p. 41.

³ 1, p. 42.

⁴ 1, p. 44.

⁵ 1, p. 32.

⁶ 1, p. 47.

⁷ 1, p. 44.

all?⁸ Does history as such furnish us with a standard by which to judge of the true and the false? To such questions as these Bowman makes reply in the following words:

The criterion will be neither correspondence—that point-to-point relationship which here more than elsewhere is devoid of meaning—nor mere workability nor any narrowly logical coherence. Yet in a sense it will be all of these. It will be coherence, if by that we mean, not any sort of principle binding things together into a systematic whole, but rather the power of all things, by throwing light upon one another, to reveal the true character of each. And it will be workability, if religion can be shown to tell us not only what things can be done but what things it is worth trying to do—more particularly if it can tell us by what changes in the fundamental assumptions the impossible becomes possible. Lastly it will be correspondence if its ideal postulates have their realizable counterparts—not their images and copies—in the actualities of experience.⁹

With the obligation upon him to sift the “facts,” and with the general criterion of coherence, workability and correspondence in his hand, Bowman proceeds to discuss the various methods that have been used in the study of religion. He speaks of three such methods. There is, first, the rationalistic method of the eighteenth century. There is, second, the historical or comparative method. There is, third, the anthropological method.

Bowman subjects the eighteenth century method to a severe criticism. The eighteenth century method, he says, has failed to observe the difference between “Truth of Concepts” and “Truth of Propositions.”¹⁰ For the eighteenth century method, truth and falsehood appear in the form of logical disjunctives; truth is absolutely true and falsehood is absolutely false.¹¹ No doubt Bowman had this propositional form of the contrast between truth and error in mind when he spoke, as we have noted in the quotation given above, of a criterion of narrowly logical coherence.

Over against the criterion of a narrowly logical coherence, this propositional conception of the relation of truth and falsehood, Bowman places his criterion of a wider coherence, his notion of truth as a matter of adequacy of concept. When we deal with the question of the adequacy of a concept we may still state our questions in propositional form but our whole emphasis then rests upon the meaning of the predicate. We can no longer say that Napoleon is either virtuous or not virtuous. “Thus it may not be possible with truth to assert of Napoleon either that he is virtuous or that he is not. The case is much more complicated. Both propositions may be true at once or both may be false; and in a sense it may be the case that both propositions are true and yet that neither is true.”¹² It is in this manner that Bowman hopes to do justice to the fact that Napoleon may have some good in him while yet he may not be a paragon of virtue. And thus religion may be a true religion even though its doctrinal statement is deficient or “not altogether true.”¹³ It is thus also that he hopes to do justice to those religions that have something of truth in them though they are largely false. It is thus, in short, that Bowman hopes to pay tribute to a religion that is genuinely unique and at the same time universal.¹⁴

⁸ 1, p. 46.

⁹ 1, pp. 42 f.

¹⁰ 1, p. 57.

¹¹ 1, p. 69.

¹² 1, pp. 70 f.

¹³ 1, p. 74.

¹⁴ 1, p. 82.

The historical method, says Bowman, is more profitable than the eighteenth century method inasmuch as it allows for growth in religion. On the other hand the historical method in itself is uncritical. It does not take cognizance of the fact that history as such “contains no principles of judgment.”¹⁵ A true anthropological method will be truly historical but it will turn historical study to a philosophical account. It will know “how to utilize the evidence.”¹⁶

This anthropological method, therefore, is truly critical. It seeks for the conditions of actual existence.¹⁷ The chief of these conditions we soon find to be the existence of “what we call selves—highly integrated, self-identical wholes, which we have not begun to explain when we have enumerated the conditions of their physical existence.”¹⁸ Developing this argument Bowman finds personality to be not only the “transcendental condition of the validity of moral distinctions” but also of religious distinctions.¹⁹ “Among the principles determining the use of anthropological material must therefore be placed a constant consideration of the question how far any individual religion or any set of religious usages or beliefs is fitted, in a theoretical and practical way, to enhance the personalist interpretation of life.”²⁰

Bowman is quite correct in saying that “we have here a highly significant principle of discrimination.”²¹ From this point on we can to a large extent anticipate the general conclusions to which the author will come. There is placed before us a truly amazing wealth of material. This material is handled with a master’s hand. The sweep of the argument is truly grand. Yet for all our admiration it remains true that the general conclusion about the nature of religion is disappointing. Bowman comes to a highly refined type of personalistic philosophy but he falls short of a truly Christian conception of religion.

The reason for Bowman’s failure to reach a Christian conception of religion lies, we believe, in the fact that for him God comes in at the conclusion rather than at the beginning of the argument. In presenting a truly Christian position we must think of God as the presupposition of the possibility of investigation. Facts are what they are by virtue of the existence of God. More specifically facts are what they are by virtue of the free disposition of them by the will of God. They were brought into existence by the free creative activity of God. They are sustained by the free Providence of God. They serve the purpose God wishes them to serve. It is the self-coherent God who must give coherence to the facts with which we, human beings, have to do.

Bowman speaks of coherence as a test of the truly religious. He rejects a narrowly logical type of coherence. We can only rejoice in that. Man’s powers of logical comprehension cannot well be the test of reality and truth. But what of Bowman’s own principle of Coherence? That principle no less than the one we have seen him reject is based upon the assumption that God is but one factor among many which must, by

¹⁵ 1, p. 83.

¹⁶ 1, p. 87.

¹⁷ 1, p. 89.

¹⁸ 1, p. 91.

¹⁹ 1, pp. 92 f.

²⁰ 1, p. 93.

²¹ 1, p. 93.

throwing light upon one another, reveal the true character of each. Bowman is very specific in his rejection of the creation idea as we have spoken of it. He speaks of God's relation to the universe as being that of Creator.²² He is anxious to avoid the identification of bare possibility with being. Yet he is very insistent that the facts of the physical universe operate independently of the plan of God. For him mechanism is simply a fact of nature.²³ Modern science shows nature as operating in accord with a system of laws. This should logically lead us to think of nature, says Bowman, as being autonomous.²⁴ Thus it appears that an independently existing nature is one of the facts that must throw light upon the nature of God. It is, according to Bowman, no doubt true that God as another factor is to throw light upon the meaning of nature. But even so God and the universe are correlatives of one another. For the physical scientist then, if we are able to follow Bowman, God would be no more than a limiting ideal of rationality.²⁵

If we should accept this position of Bowman for our own would we then have coherence in our experience? It does not seem so. For our notion of coherence Bowman, after all, throws us upon the mercy of the "bad infinite." Experience is not only seen to stretch out far beyond the reach of our logical categories but it is evident that these logical categories themselves have no foundation. There is from the outset of Bowman's argument an unwarranted separation of fact and interpretation of fact.

As the point of coherence is of basic importance to Bowman we shall restate our criticism by pointing out that the strictures our author makes upon the method of the eighteenth century may, *mutatis mutandis*, be made upon his own method. The eighteenth century method, says Bowman, was a method based upon a false propositional logic which took no notice of the specific differences of things. For this method all that mattered was the quantity and the quality of the proposition. For this method, too, truth is a matter of the copula rather than of the predicate. Speaking of this eighteenth century method Bowman says:

The logic of the method is a strictly practical logic. We begin by assuming an attitude of neutrality. No religion, no doctrine shall claim more than another. Each, so to speak, shall stand for one. Now when doctrines differ, there will be some that are mutually inconsistent and some that are not obviously so. Confining ourselves to the former, we see that if one is selected as true, the others must be considered false. But having regard to our principle of neutrality, we are not permitted any such selection. The only practical way to avoid impossible choices is therefore by rejecting, not the individual propositions in question, but the cases in which such incompatible propositions occur.

Coming now to doctrines which differ but are not obviously incompatible a somewhat similar argument will apply. There are three possibilities. Either (1) all may be true, or (2) all may be false, or (3) some may be false and some true. But so long as we preserve our attitude of strict neutrality, there is no reason why we should decide either in favor of or against any one of the three contingencies.²⁶

Bowman tells us on the basis of the criticism made that the eighteenth century method may be described as a "pragmatism of negations."²⁷ The point he stresses is that it is

²² 2, pp. 424 f.

²³ 1, p. 52.

²⁴ 2, p. 390.

²⁵ 2, p. 413.

²⁶ 1, p. 77.

²⁷ 1, p. 78.

impossible really to distinguish between better and worse by the method criticized. It is this criticism that we wish to apply to Bowman's own method. He too, in the last analysis, starts with absolute neutrality. His final appeal is to an experience that is open to all. For him too all religions really have equal standing. It is, therefore, on the one hand, impossible for him to reach the position where anything can really be called true. So far from all things throwing light upon one another in order to reveal the true character of each, all things are in darkness still. The highest position one can reach with a non-Christian methodology is still no more than a "pragmatism of negations."

The second aspect of the criterion employed by Bowman in his study of religion is workability. By this he does not wish us to think of a narrow pragmatism as, in the question of coherence, he did not wish us to think of a narrowly logical coherence. He wants the supernatural to help the natural. He wants the ideal to become the real; he wants values to become facts.

Here, too, we can but admire the fact that Bowman seeks for that which is high and noble. He has a good deal to say about our right to believe in a personal God. The heart of his argument for our right to believe in a personal God lies in his analysis of human personality. Human personality, he reasons, needs other persons for its significant existence. Yet other finite persons do not furnish an adequate environment for human personality. Reality would be an ultimate enigma but for the existence of a personal God.²⁸ Is there anything to which we must object in this mode of reasoning? We must, however unwillingly, object that the meaning of these words is colored by the fact already mentioned that for Bowman God is at most a correlative to the universe. It is not possible to frame a valid argument for the existence of God from the personality of man unless one also frames an argument, or rather the same argument, for the existence of God from the universe which surrounds man. If mechanism is a fact of nature, as Bowman says it is, human personality will be, in part at least, determined by that fact. God can then, at best, be one among other factors in the determination of human personality.

We are not surprised then to find that for Bowman man is necessary for God as God is necessary for man. Says he: "It would seem to be a postulate of the Christian standpoint that the existence of finite human selves, so far from being the root of all evil, is a divine necessity. Man, with all his limitations, is necessary to God."²⁹ Nor need we depend upon the very words by which this is affirmed; it is implied in the method of investigation used. For Bowman man is sufficient to himself in the interpretation of large areas of existence and in large areas of his moral endeavor. The God whom such a man may find it necessary to discover is not a God who needs to do much for him. Man, in that case, needs at most a finite God. Granted such a God has been found he cannot do many mighty works for man. He cannot make the "impossible" to become possible. The God whom Bowman seems to want but for whom he makes no provision in his discussion is the God of the Christian faith. That God is the Creator of the universe. That God is the true, because the only final, environment for the personality of man. Bowman finds the modern conception of impersonal nature to be necessary for a true appreciation of the personal God. To this we should reply by saying that man's environment in the

²⁸ 2, pp. 398 f.

²⁹ 2, pp. 333 f.

way of trees and rocks and oceans is, to be sure, impersonal in the immediate sense of the term but in it and through it we are always dealing with God. We are to do all that we do to the glory of God. In the final resort all of life must be religious, if any of it is to be religious. It is only thus that the finite personality has unity for itself; it is only thus that our religion really works. We must hold that Bowman's religion, however exalted its form of statement in comparison with crass naturalisms of various sorts, nevertheless does not really work. The third aspect of the criterion by which Bowman seeks to establish the true nature of religion is correspondence. The ideal postulates of religion are to have their realizable counterparts in the actualities of experience.

There is a constant emphasis in Bowman's book upon the contention that experience is our final guide. Again he desires that we should have no narrow view of experience. He does not require that men be able to speak fully and intelligibly of their experience of contact with a personal God in order to be called truly religious. On the contrary he affirms or assumes that what we speak of when we speak of God must be within the reach of all human beings. Bowman speaks of the "introverted view of life." It is that view of life which does not stop short at the phenomenal aspect of existence but reads in the phenomenal the spiritual meaning which the phenomenal is calculated to convey.³⁰ Bowman says:

Assuredly we do not rest our claim to selfhood exclusively upon the phenomenal aspect of nature. And if we do not, we tacitly acknowledge an extra-phenomenal range of experience. It is upon this, in the last resort, that our knowledge of what it is to exist and to be a self depends; and once this is granted, the world of phenomena is seen to acquire a new significance and a new function in the economy of human life. It becomes, as I have said, a phenomenal equivalent—a vast system of signs directing us about the world in our numberless contacts with other selves, but in itself unable to unlock the secret door that leads to the inner nature and the inner experience of any self whatever.³¹

The "introverted view of life" as thus spoken of should be carefully distinguished from the Christian concept of regeneration, Bowman cannot accept the Christian conception of regeneration if he is to remain true to his principle of interpretation. That principle works from the bottom to the top whereas the idea of regeneration implies God's activity in regeneration as a gift of grace to man. Regeneration in the Christian sense of the term would be for Bowman a violation of his principle that general human experience must be able to judge of the validity of that which comes to it by the help of that which it already knows.

In all this Bowman is perfectly consistent. For him coherence, workability and correspondence are based upon the assumption that the natural man is normal. He makes no difference between the experience of the natural and the experience of the regenerated man. To be sure, he speaks of the once-born and the twice-born as this has been done in modern psychology-of-religion literature. But the twice-born are not differentiated from the once-born by anything but the fact that they have the "introverted view of life" spoken of above.

It is difficult to accord too high a tribute to the book of Bowman as a piece of philosophical writing. We are very appreciative of the high conception of religion he sets forth and defends. Yet the highest conception of religion, as long as it does not

³⁰ 2, pp. 329 f.

³¹ 2, pp. 308 f.

presuppose the existence of God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe to whom, now that man has sinned, no one can come except by grace, falls short of the glory of God and must in the last analysis be classed with the naturalisms of which it has given such valuable criticism.

A Sacramental Universe

Archibald Allan Bowman: *A Sacramental Universe*. Being a study in the Metaphysics of Experience. Edited by J. W. Scott. Princeton: Princeton University Press. London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford, University Press. 1939. 28, 428. \$5.00.

In this volume of the late Professor Bowman there lies before us one of the most profound metaphysical treatises of recent years. A careful study of it will amply repay those who seek to understand the controlling principles of modern philosophy. A good share of the book is taken up with a penetrating criticism of the tendency toward naturalistic monism so prevalent in modern philosophy. In contrast with this tendency Bowman finds an irreducible duality in experience. At the outset he tells us what he hopes to establish:

To anticipate conclusions, my contention is reducible, in the main, to the following four points. (1) There are grounds for conceiving the physical world as a self-contained and indefeasibly non-subjective system of functionally related particulars—many of the latter themselves physical systems. (2) There are grounds for believing in the existence of subjective systems, otherwise known as spiritual beings or persons, and for thinking of these as irreducibly non-physical in character. (3) Any attempt to qualify the duality of the spiritual and the physical, any monistic prejudice which tends to obscure the absoluteness of the cleavage between these two ultimate modes of being, is fatal to an understanding of either, and is indeed apt to issue, not in a genuine monism, but in a dualism more invidious than that which it is designed to obviate. And (4), while nothing can detract from the ontological distinctiveness of the dual opposites, the spiritual and the physical enter into relations of a highly determinate character, from which arise certain new possibilities of being, (a) the forms of life and (b) the various types of value. Among the latter are the sensory and perceptual qualities of things, and the characters which we denote by the names charm or agreeableness, utility, beauty, wistfulness, glamour, sublimity, sanctity. I recognize a realm of being, an order or domain to which each of these belongs. One such domain is that which we ordinarily call the natural world. Nature on this view is the objective world of our perceptual experience, and the explanation of it is to be found in a functional dependence upon the relationship between the physical and the spiritual modes of being. Thus nature reflects the life of spirit in meanings that spirit imparts to the inanimate and non-spiritual. A universe in which such possibilities exist is a sacramental universe. That is to say, not only do its impersonal forms and processes propagate themselves in endless characteristic rhythms and purposeless recurrences: in relation to the consciousness of spiritual agents they contract meanings which minister to the power that calls them into being. And thus the spirit, having sanctified them to its use, renews the power from which all sanctity proceeds through their appropriation.¹

We can readily recognize in these conclusions, which Bowman expects to establish, the “personalist interpretation of life” for which he contends in his *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*.²

The method by which Bowman expects to reach his conclusions is, to an extent at least, stated in the passage given. Any view that minimizes or denies the irreducible character and the functional relationship of the original physical and spiritual modes of being issues in a dualism. Bowman argues that we must hold to duality to avoid dualism.

The argument as further developed seeks to prove that our experience itself requires for its explanation the presupposition of the existence of systematic subjective, and

¹ pp. 9 f.

² *vide* Vol. 1, p. 93.

therefore self-conscious, experience on the one hand and the existence of the “purely physical”³ on the other hand. And of these two the emphasis rests upon the former. Says Bowman: “What I wish to show in particular is that the world we know, the world of our actual experience, is unthinkable except in so far as we recognize the existence of systems having the character of subjectivity.”⁴ We shall note briefly the negative and the positive aspects of the author’s argument.

Both of these aspects of the argument find their natural development in a searching analysis of the monistic and naturalistic systems of Santayana and Whitehead.

Santayana and Whitehead, says Bowman, “are outstanding representatives of the current tendency to pass over the duality of body and mind as if the distinction were wanting in depth and reality.”⁵ “Behind this whole movement of thought,” he adds, “is a reluctance to take spirit seriously, and a manifest determination to exalt the natural to a position of complete preeminence.”⁶ Let us note Bowman’s criticism of Santayana’s views.

Santayana, says Bowman, seeks by his concept of “essences” to remove “all interpretative accretions from the bare deliverances of experience.”⁷ The part played by “essences” in the economy of an ever-changing world of existence is, according to Whitehead as quoted by Bowman, that they “enable existence to pass from one phase to another, and enable the mind to note and describe the change.”⁸ The “essences” are “invariables beyond the stream of time.”⁹ They are not merely general terms derived by sorting out the common element in the manifold of changing existence. They owe nothing to generalization. They are self-contained.¹⁰ Like the Platonic Idea the “essences” define the things numerically distinct but are not themselves among the things they define.¹¹ The stream of existence is in no way caused by the essences, but by a “compulsion that is entirely its own” passes from one essence to another.¹² By this rigid separation of “essences” from the temporal flux Santayana aims to avoid the “cosmological, metaphysical, or moral prerogatives” attributed by Plato to his Ideas.¹³

In criticizing Santayana’s doctrine of “essences” and existence Bowman says: “By no possibility can this interpretation of existence and this philosophy of meanings be brought into intelligible relation. The mere attempt to harmonize the two points of view reveals the implicit contradictoriness of the situation. The being of the essences and the existence of a natural world are opposites, and cannot be lodged together either in the realm of essence or in that of matter. At the same time they cannot be separated.”¹⁴

³ p. 228.

⁴ p. 13.

⁵ p. 59.

⁶ p. 60.

⁷ p. 60.

⁸ p. 61.

⁹ p. 61.

¹⁰ p. 61.

¹¹ p. 62.

¹² p. 64.

¹³ p. 65.

pp. 65 f.

There has been a radical mistake in the procedure of Santayana's thinking. We need a reversal of method if we are to avoid the abstract separation between "essence" and being in Santayana's would-be monistic philosophy. Of this reversal of method Bowman speaks as follows:

Now the procedure I wish to suggest is one that involves a radical change of viewpoint. If nature is an ordered sequence of events, the relevant question has to do with the fixation of identities. How is each successive phase determined? Under what conditions does it come to have the precise character, quantitative or qualitative, which, by methods of empirical observation, we perceive it to possess? It will be seen that when the question is so put, essence and existence are assumed to be inseparably united under the postulate being. The former is nothing but the identity of the latter, the latter nothing but the realization of that identity.¹⁵

It is in order here to explain what Bowman would have us understand by "the postulate of being." This can best be done if we analyze the notion of scientific knowledge as Bowman thinks of it. We require the "postulate of being" if scientific knowledge is to be intelligible. Says Bowman: "In the last analysis every scientific problem is a problem in identity. The purpose in each case is to render things clear by telling us what they are. In practice this frequently means explaining how they come to be. A motion in space, for example, is defined as the product of antecedent forces, a geological formation, a plant or an animal species as the ultimate term in an evolutionary process. But the abstract type of all such explanations, whatever the mode of being or the nature of the phenomenon to which they have reference, is the mathematical equation. Here we seek to fix the identity of the expression on the left-hand side by means of the expression on the right. When the latter is an independent variable, the relation between the two is functional, and the dependent expression is called a function of the independent. Furthermore, quantities that are functionally related are said to constitute a system."¹⁶

We need the "postulate of being," it appears, in order to justify the application of our intellectual constructions to the world of changing reality. It is a postulate of being inasmuch as we cannot be certain, apart from experience, that system exists in nature. "Whether the world in its entirety is a system may be open to question."¹⁷ We merely use the notion of a single universe as a regulative idea.¹⁸ As such, however, it is indispensable. Without the postulate of being as a limiting notion we may have system but we do not have a world.

At this juncture a word must be said about Bowman's conception of time. He tells us at the very start that he takes time for granted as the universal form of existence. Says he: "Of course I shall have to assume time. This I take to be the universal form of existence, and without it everything would fall to the ground. But granted time, and granted events which are also states of consciousness, identifiable in all their subjective particularity, I have virtually everything necessary to render the application of my special notions metaphysically fruitful. By means of these I hope to obtain a conception of the spiritual

¹⁵ pp. 66 f.

¹⁶ pp. 7 f.

¹⁷ p. 8.

¹⁸ p. 8.

mode of being sufficiently exact to justify the attempt to relate the latter to the concept of the physical as developed by scientific investigation.”¹⁹

It appears that by assuming time as the “universal form of existence” Bowman feels he is justified, methodologically at least, in making the “postulate of being.” “It is my hope, also,” he says, “that the recognition of time as integral to the constitution of all actually existing systems will be of some use as indicating a possible way to escape from an impasse which is as old as Plato, and into which (in a greatly aggravated form) modern philosophy has been led by some of its ablest exponents. I am thinking principally of the systems of Professor Whitehead and Professor Santayana, in which nature figures as a process in time, all of whose distinguishable characters are timeless essences or eternal objects.”²⁰ What Bowman proposes amounts basically to this. Spiritual existence, and particularly subjective, personal existence, is to be thought of as a temporal process. The person who knows an “object” no less than the “object” known by the person must admit of temporal change. If the subject who knows does not exist in time he cannot exist as a unifying center of interpretation. Summing up a detailed discussion of the time problem, Bowman concludes: “From every point of view we are driven to the conclusion that the permanent cannot be identified with the non-temporal, whether in the form of space or of timelessness. We must consequently seek it in the time-conditioned. The theoretical requirements of the case will obviously be met if the contents of any manifold, into which time enters as a component, can be shown not only to differentiate themselves, but also to be thereby integrated, in respect of their temporal character. This condition is fulfilled in so far as events and the constituents of events are functionally related and so organized together into systems. A detailed exposition of the subject calls for a special inquiry into the nature of time. Without such an inquiry, our treatment of the physical cannot be considered complete.”²¹

The “special inquiry into the nature of time” which Bowman meant to give us was found, the editor tells us, “too incomplete for publication.”²² From an article on “Spirit-Time” published at an earlier date²³ as well as from the book under consideration, we may perhaps learn what the main contention of a fuller discussion would have been. We can do no more than intimate the chief characteristic of Bowman’s views on time.

Bowman contends that the human mind exists as a cumulative center of interpretative experience because man exists temporally. It is because man exists temporally, so runs the argument, that he can accumulate his past into the present and make of the present a center of interpretation for the future. The present is not a mere razor-blade line of division that has no content and therefore merely serves to separate a discontinuous past from an equally discontinuous future. The present is a specious present.²⁴ It is not a mere limit but a “meeting-place, or synthesis, of the past and the future.”²⁵ It is not a

¹⁹ p. 7.

²⁰ p. 25.

²¹ p. 328.

²² p. 329 note.

²³ See Aristotelian Society, *Proceedings* 1932–33, p. 295.

²⁴ p. 364.

²⁵ p. 364.

“durationless point” but has a “certain extensity.”²⁶ “The time so characterized may be designated spirit-time in contradistinction to the space-time of the physical world.”²⁷

On this view of time, experience is no longer “a mere receptivity of successive states of consciousness” but an active systematic adjustment of the psycho-physical organism.²⁸

If we have not altogether failed in finding the central thrust of Bowman’s argument, the main point of his contention ought now to be fairly clear. If we think of man as a cumulative center of experience, we no longer face the invidious dualism that philosophy has faced since its inception in Greece. To be sure, there will be some aspects of the “utterly and absolutely physical”²⁹ that cannot be accumulated by the present interpretative experience of the individual and the race. Yet, for all that, the universe is a sacramental universe, a universe full of meaning. We need not resort to monistic reductions to bring thought and being into unity. Modally irreducible forms of existence may be brought into a systematic unity. Our “postulate of being” has been justified.

There is one further point that must be brought to the fore in connection with Bowman’s view of time. By the help of his conception of time, Bowman forges what he thinks of as a genuinely theistic interpretation of life. We quote his words at length: The original Democritean overemphasis on spatiality has had to be corrected, and time has had to be recognized as an integral factor in the physically real. With this there has entered into the nature of physical reality a character which, in the last resort, can only be spiritually understood. A relation to the spiritual which we can only call creaturely is thereby indicated in the nature of the physical itself. For the definition of creation is the functional dependence of the physical world in its entirety on the energies of spirit. Now it is clearly not from our individual spirits that these energies can be conceived to go forth. We must assume a spirit adequate to the task. We must assume God. God is the metaphysical correlate of the creative activity which we are compelled to assume in order to account for the existence of the physical world.

In the concept of God, the definitory notion must be that of eternity. He is the eternal spirit—this, not in the timeless sense, but in the sense of an everlasting endurance. The being of God defines itself in relation to its time conditions, as an absolutely perfect adjustment of every past to every future in a present that is infinite in each direction.

God and the created universe. The spiritual mode of being, like the physical, is to be conceived as a vibratory system; vibrating in the non-spatial time of the spirit, as the other does in space-time.

The vibrations or undulatory motions of the spirit are nonspatial. What is the meaning of this statement?

It means that for purposes of His own, the divine Being creates within the ambit of His nature, a region where the undulations of His spirit die out in infinitesimal vibrations and cease to function as a time-compelling power of consciousness. Space is the unconsciousness of Omniscience, the unconsciousness of God; and the creation of a spatial universe is one of the ways in which the Creator diversifies the infinite, unbroken curve of His existence. The vibrations of the physical world are the faint overtones of the divine orchestration. Or, to vary the metaphor, they are the last ripples that break the surface of the creeks and backwaters of existence, where being dies away into nothingness because it ceases to be spiritual.³⁰

²⁶ p. 364.

²⁷ p. 364.

²⁸ p. 365.

²⁹ p. 228.

³⁰ pp. 369 f.

It is difficult to do justice to a book so rich and various in content as this book of Bowman. It is a truly masterful attempt to meet the dilemma that faces post-Kantian philosophy. Of this dilemma Bowman himself writes as follows: "Thus is Idealism haunted by the thought of a reality which is never fully explained or explicable by the conceptions at its disposal, while Realism, while recognising in logically authenticated conceptions the only genuine knowledge, hands reality over to the custody of ideas."³¹ Post-Kantian philosophy has boldly burned its bridges behind itself. It will have none of what Hegel called "*die alte Metaphysik*." This "alte Metaphysik" with its notion of a self-contained God and a world created by the will of God in the absolutely non-existent has for Kantian and post-Kantian philosophy all the objectionable features of a "thing in itself." And the Kantian criticism of the "thing in itself" may well be summed up in Bowman's own words: "The latter could not be retained in the world of the knowable without destroying the autonomy of a knowledge found to rest upon its own principles and deriving its validity from conformity to these."³²

Bowman plainly adopts an essentially Kantian epistemology. This is apparent in all his major philosophical writings. There can be no reasonable doubt that for him the test of truth is an autonomous human experience and that his position is definitely phenomenological.

The question is what sort of theism comports with a phenomenological philosophy. There are those who hold that upon phenomenological principles all metaphysics is impossible. Bowman is not one of these. He argues that metaphysics is indeed possible upon a phenomenological basis if only we look upon the content of our metaphysics as the implicate of our phenomenological knowledge. He even holds that metaphysics is necessary. Without it, he reasons, phenomenological knowledge itself would be unintelligible. For him human experience lacks coherence unless it be related to God.³³

But the God who, according to Bowman, is indispensable for the intelligibility of human experience is, as noted above, a God whose eternity consists in everlasting temporal endurance. Time is for Bowman without qualification the form of every possible mode of existence. So far from falling into ambiguity on this point, as Idealist philosophers all too frequently do, Bowman is utterly specific and insistent that this is the logical outcome of a Kantian position. We find ourselves in full agreement with him on this point. It would, we feel, clarify the present theological atmosphere a great deal if this point were appreciated in its far-reaching implications.

The chief of these implications we would find in the fact that the God of historic Christianity and the God of post-Kantian philosophy are basically at variance with one another. If anything is elemental in the Biblical notion of God it is that he is self-contained or self-definitory. If anything is elemental in the post-Kantian notion of God it is that he is not self-definitory. As in his *Studies in the Philosophy of Religion*³⁴ so in *A Sacramental Universe* the God of Bowman finds a universe with resident forces, forces not derived from the creative act of God. We have noted Bowman's emphasis on the

³¹ Article on "Kant's View of Metaphysics" in *Mind*, N.S., Vol. 25, October, 1916, p. 482.

³² *Idem*, p. 488.

³³ Article on "Kant's View of Metaphysics" in *Mind*, N.S., Vol. 25, January, 1916, p. 21.

³⁴ *Vide this Journal*, November, 1939, pp. 55 f.

irreducible nature of two distinct modes of being. Bowman has sought to study the “possibilities of being in the light of its most significant distinctions.”³⁵ But for him these most significant distinctions are a self-existent spirituality on the one hand and “the physical world as a self-contained and infeasibly non-subjective system of functionally related particulars”³⁶ on the other hand. When therefore he speaks of the spiritual mode of being revealing itself “in a way that is altogether definitory”³⁷ this is not to be taken strictly. Bowman means simply to urge that spirit is no mere epiphenomenon of matter. A really self-definitory notion of the spiritual mode of being would involve the position that no other irreducibly ultimate mode of being exists. Such a self-definitory notion of being would, accordingly, have to find the “most significant distinctions” of reality within that spiritual mode of being itself. It is this that we find in the Biblical doctrine of God. In the God of Scripture we do not have an accumulating, but an eternally complete and therefore wholly systematic and fully self-conscious, Experience. For Bowman God is really no more than an independent variable; for historic Christianity God is One for whom there is no variableness or shadow that is cast by turning.

We ask in conclusion whether the God-concept of post-Kantian philosophy, presented at its very best as it is by Bowman, or the God-concept of the historic Christian faith makes human experience intelligible. We make bold to suggest that Bowman has after all fallen into the “invidious dualism” which he has so nobly striven to avoid. It seems to us that no phenomenalist position can avoid doing this. The “spiritual” cannot be thought of as a self-definitory system, if it finds over against itself a self-dependent series of events in a world not actually produced by itself.

Bowman is no doubt right in his constant insistence that a self-contained system is the only presupposition on which experience can be made intelligible. He is unable, however, on his assumptions, to find such a system. We have observed how it is by the help of his time-concept that he hopes to justify his “postulate of being” in order thus to provide for a basis of union between “facts” and “logic.” His attempt on this score is truly grand but the best of minds cannot do the impossible. A temporally accumulating system is, after all is said and done, a system that is face to face with utterly unrelated facts. The “fallacy of bifurcation” cannot be outgrown unless one has the courage really to presuppose the God of the historic Christian creeds who is ultimately simple and whose simplicity is fully and eternally exhausted by his diversity. Bowman would speak of independent variables of which God is one and the universe is another. For him these two may, by the help of his “postulate of being” be thought of as standing in functional relationship to one another, while reciprocity is of the essence of this functional relationship. For Bowman the problem is therefore to “reconcile the indefinite manifoldness of experience and the infeasible oneness of the self-identical ego.”³⁸ Historic Christianity presupposes the functional and therefore reciprocal exhaustiveness of the independently invariable Experience called the triune God. On this presupposition alone is there really an “infeasible and self-identical ego” and if there is such an infeasible Ego there is no longer an “indefinite manifoldness of experience” with which it must stand in reciprocal

³⁵ p. 217.

³⁶ p. 9.

³⁷ p. 217.

³⁸ p. 189.

relation. If the problem of philosophy were what Bowman makes it out to be, it would be insoluble. Any philosophy that has as one of its major assumptions the notion of an “indefinite manifoldness of experience” has made an everlasting cleavage between thought and being.

Professor Bowman’s book, here all too inadequately discussed, should help to make clear the issues facing thoughtful men. From it men might learn to see that he who espouses an essentially Kantian epistemology cannot, if he would be consistent, also do justice to historic Christianity. Historic Christianity needs as its foundation the God who is “infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.” A Kantian epistemology can at best allow for a god who is a “*Grenzbegriff*,” an enlarged edition of human personality. Such a God is not the Creator-God of the Bible. It is not he against whom man has sinned. It is not he, whose eternal Son has assumed a human nature in order in it to die on the cross for sinners. The theologies of such men as Barth, Brunner, Piper and Lewis show how impossible it is to serve two masters; men cannot serve both Kant and Christ.

The Nature And Destiny Of Man

Reinhold Niebuhr's *Beyond Tragedy*, published in 1937, consisted of "Essays on the Christian Interpretation of History." The Gifford Lectures on *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, 1941 undertake a similar task on a larger scale and in a more systematic manner. The first volume of this work lies before us. It deals with Human Nature. The second volume, soon to follow, will deal with Human Destiny.

In reading the volume on *Human Nature* our high expectations are not disappointed. The breadth and depth of vision of Niebuhr's work mark it as a worthy companion to the lectures given on the Gifford foundation by William James, John Dewey, Josiah Royce and William E. Hocking. Niebuhr tries to see life whole and see it through.

"Man has always been his own most vexing problem. How shall he think of himself? Every affirmation which he may make about his stature, virtue, or place in the cosmos becomes involved in contradictions when fully analysed."¹ In this very first sentence of his book Niebuhr serves notice that we can no longer be satisfied with a narrow naturalism or an equally narrow rationalism. Dewey and Whitehead are taken to task, the former for his rigid naturalism, the latter for his rigid rationalism. The "confidence in the goodness of man" displayed in the naturalism of Dewey, argues Niebuhr, is equalled if not surpassed by the "idealistic optimism" of Whitehead. Whitehead's "speculative reason" is the reason " 'which Plato shares with God.' " Though hampered by the " 'pragmatic reason,' " " 'which Ulysses shares with the foxes,' " it none the less " 'seeks with disinterested curiosity an understanding of the world.' "²

Niebuhr has no sympathy either with naturalistic or rationalistic optimism. He says they share a common weakness. For them the "unquietness of the human spirit" is something that does not lie embedded in the very nature of man.

This broad indictment becomes broader still in the following words:

All modern views of human nature are adaptations, transformations and varying compounds of primarily two distinctive views of man: (a) The view of classical antiquity, that is of the Graeco-Roman world, and (b) the Biblical view. It is important to remember that while these two views are distinct and partly incompatible, they were actually merged in the thought of medieval Catholicism. (The perfect expression of this union is to be found in the Thomistic synthesis of Augustinian and Aristotelian thought.) The history of modern culture really begins with the destruction of the synthesis, foreshadowed in nominalism, and completed in the Renaissance and Reformation. In the dissolution of the synthesis, the Renaissance distilled the classical elements out of the synthesis and the Reformation sought to free the Biblical from the classical elements. Liberal Protestantism is an effort (on the whole an abortive one) to reunite the two elements.³

In opposition to this modern, largely classical view of man, Niebuhr strives to make a truly Christian analysis of the nature of man. We are to investigate the metaphysical presuppositions of both the classical-modern and the Christian view of man.

¹ p. 1.

² p. 113.

³ p. 5.

As the classical view is determined by Greek metaphysical presuppositions, so the Christian view is determined by the ultimate presuppositions of Christian faith.⁴

As soon as we reach this point, however, our difficulties with Niebuhr's position emerge. We rejoice in the penetrating criticism he offers of various "naturalistic" and "rationalistic" views. Yet we are bound to maintain that his analysis of the presuppositions of the Christian faith itself rests upon the assumption of the truth of the classical-modern view of man. Niebuhr speaks of the Christian view of man as follows: The Christian faith in God as creator of the world transcends the canons and antinomies of rationality, particularly the antinomy between mind and matter, between consciousness and extension. God is not merely mind who forms a previously given formless stuff. God is both vitality and form and the source of all existence. He creates the world. This world is not God; but it is not evil because it is not God. Being God's creation, it is good.⁵

Continuing his exposition of the Christian view of man Niebuhr writes: The second important characteristic of the Christian view of man is that he is understood primarily from the standpoint of God, rather than the uniqueness of his rational faculties or his relation to nature. He is made in the 'image of God.'⁶

In these words human nature may appear at first glance to be interpreted in terms of truly Christian categories. God "as will and personality" and this God as revealing himself in Christ, argues Niebuhr, is the presupposition of the Christian view of man. Says he:

The Christian faith in God's self-disclosure, culminating in the revelation of Christ, is thus the basis of the Christian concept of personality and individuality. In terms of this faith man can understand himself as a unity of will which finds its end in the will of God.⁷

Has Niebuhr here, or in exposition of these general enunciations elsewhere in his book, really stated the presuppositions of the Christian view of man? We cannot think so. Niebuhr's criticism of naturalism and idealism are in themselves exceedingly fine. His strictures on the "scientific method"⁸ point to broader vision than is often manifested. To say that, "from the Christian point of view the whole pathos of original sin expresses itself in the pretensions of idealistic thought"⁹ might seem to require him to reject the self-sufficiency of the "autonomous individual" of the Renaissance.¹⁰ To add that, "within the alternatives of naturalism and idealism the modern man ... faces either the submergence of both his individuality and his spirit in natural causality or the submergence of his individuality and the deification of his spirit in the universality of reason"¹¹ might seem to commit him to the doctrine of a self-sufficient God. Yet such is not the case. Niebuhr seeks, and thinks he finds, a third possibility between "naturalism" and "rationalism" on the one hand and orthodox Christianity on the other.

The third possibility Niebuhr finds in a position similar to that of Kierkegaard of whom he speaks as "the greatest of Christian psychologists."¹² Kierkegaard, he says, has

⁴ p. 12.

⁵ p. 12.

⁶ p. 13.

p. 15.

⁸ p. 73.

⁹ p. 80.

¹⁰ p. 61.

¹¹ p. 82.

¹² p. 44.

taught us how to bridge the impassible gulf between “ideas” and “facts” presupposed by both naturalism and idealism. He has done so with his notion of the self, the Individual. This individual, he argues, unifies within himself true universality and true particularity. A true view of human nature, says Niebuhr, goes deeper than either naturalism or idealism can go. A true view of nature reckons with sin, even with original sin. But how can man be inherently sinful and yet free? “The final paradox is that the discovery of the inevitability of sin is man’s highest assertion of freedom.”¹³ This solution, thinks Niebuhr, we largely owe to Kierkegaard:

Kierkegaard’s explanation of the dialectical relation of freedom and fate in sin is one of the profoundest in Christian thought. He writes: ‘The concept of sin and guilt does not emerge in its profoundest sense in paganism. If it did paganism would be destroyed by the contradiction that man becomes guilty by fate.... Christianity is born in this very contradiction.’¹⁴

By this “qualitative leap,” argues Niebuhr, the “paradoxical relation of inevitability and responsibility” is best explained.¹⁵ “Sin posits itself.”¹⁶ In this position Niebuhr finds “the ultra-rational foundations and presuppositions of Christian wisdom about man.”¹⁷

We naturally expect that Niebuhr will distinguish sharply between his position and that of the orthodox faith. In a section that deals with “literalistic errors” Niebuhr contrasts what he speaks of as the representative and the historical character of Adam’s sin.¹⁸ He then says:

It is obviously necessary to eliminate the literalistic illusions in the doctrine of original sin if the paradox of inevitability and responsibility is to be fully understood; for the theory of an inherited second nature is as clearly destructive of the idea of responsibility for sin as rationalistic and dualistic theories which attribute human evil to the inertia of nature.¹⁹ A little further on he adds: The relation of man’s essential nature to his sinful state cannot be solved within terms of the chronological version of the perfection before the Fall. It is, as it were, a vertical rather than horizontal relation. When the Fall is made an event in history rather than a symbol of an aspect of every historical moment in the life of man, the relation of evil to goodness in that moment is obscured.²⁰ But if the “literalistic errors” are to be rejected, we would maintain, the naturalistic and idealistic errors, against which Niebuhr has so vigorously protested, must be accepted. We face a simple but profound alternative at this point. In opposition to naturalism and idealism, Niebuhr says, “God is not merely mind who forms a previously given formless stuff.”²¹ But “formless stuff” with “abstract universal idea” is the only alternative to the “literalistic error” of creation. To say that God is “the source of all existence,”²² and not to mean this causally is to cut man in two. It is to make him an inhabitant, on the one hand, of the world of “alogical fact”²³ with the naturalists and, on the other hand, of the world of the impersonally divine with the idealist.

¹³ p. 263.

¹⁴ p. 263.

¹⁵ p. 254.

¹⁶ p. 252.

¹⁷ p. 16.

¹⁸ p. 261.

¹⁹ p. 262.

²⁰ p. 269.

²¹ p. 12.

²² p. 12.

²³ p. 120.

The error of the naturalist, argues Niebuhr, is to regard causality as the principle of meaning.²⁴ But without causal creation by a God of self-contained meaning the world of causality is what the naturalist says it is, a world without meaning. The “vitalities of history” then have in them the power to defy forever the “structure” that “God” may seek to impose upon them. It is true enough that naturalistic interpretations “do not understand the total stature of freedom in which human life stands” and that they are unable “to appreciate the necessity of a trans-historical norm of historical life.”²⁵ It is equally true however, that Niebuhr, in rejecting causal creation, retains a naturalistically interpreted world which must artificially be brought into relationship with the world of the “trans-historical.”

The error of the idealist, argues Niebuhr, is that he has a God of pure form, of abstract structure. But a God who is not the causal creator of the world can be nothing more than pure Form. We may impersonate this Form but all the bellows of our imagination cannot give it life.

What then does Niebuhr offer us that is better than the “idolatry” of naturalism and the “idolatry” of idealism? He offers us a combination of these idolatries. For all his criticism of naturalistic and idealistic “idolatries” he yet turns these “idolatries” into subordinate principles which, for him, are true in their place. His final argument is directed against what he thinks to be the mistake of substituting a subordinate for an ultimate principle of interpretation. Says he: If the effort is made to comprehend the meaning of the world through the principle of natural causation alone, the world is conceived in terms of a mechanistic coherence which has no place for the freedom which reveals itself in human consciousness. Rational principles of coherence represent another, somewhat higher, and yet inadequate system of meaning. Every effort to identify meaning with rationality implies the deification of reason.²⁶

It appears then that “naturalism” and “idealism” are, after all, thought to be right as far as they go. The “ultra-rational foundations and presuppositions” of the Christian faith will have to accord with the presuppositions of naturalism and idealism. Says Niebuhr: Though the religious faith through which God is apprehended cannot be in contradiction to reason in the sense that the ultimate principle of meaning cannot be in contradiction to the subordinate principle of meaning which is found in rational coherence yet, on the other hand religious faith cannot be simply subordinated to reason or made to stand under its judgment.²⁷

In this manner Niebuhr keeps the “ultra-rational” principles within proper bounds, within bounds that the “autonomous individual” can readily allow. The contrast between the classical-modern and the Biblical view of man has after all been effaced. With all due appreciation for the breadth of Niebuhr’s position we must yet maintain that its breadth consists, in the last analysis, in little more than an effort to give various naturalistic and idealistic perspectives their due. The superrationalistic dimensionalism that comes forth from the crucible of this procedure may be said to be “nearer to the Christian faith and a more perverse corruption of it” than either naturalism or idealism.

²⁴ p. 134.

²⁵ p. 164.

²⁶ p. 165.

²⁷ p. 165.

The Logic Of Belief

The writer of this volume is not unknown to the religious-minded public. He has already dealt with the possibility of religious knowledge in two earlier books, *The Trustworthiness of Religious Experience* and *The Knowledge of God*. The volume now under discussion is more comprehensive than either of the earlier works. It seeks to deal with all the lines of evidence for, and with all the kinds of objections against, the belief in God. It seeks, moreover, to make the “great tradition”¹ acceptable to us by showing that it is really as reasonable to believe in God as to believe in anything else.

In the Preface to his book Trueblood tells us that he has quoted from Archbishop Temple’s works more often than from any one else. For many of his sentiments he appeals not only to Temple but also to John Oman, A. E. Taylor, Rufus M. Jones and others. And there is no doubt that his position represents a widely accepted point of view.

We are to be concerned with the question of God’s existence. But the author prepares the ground by speaking at length of belief in general. Belief in facts is always a matter of probability. In matters of fact, and therefore in matters of religious belief, “there is always a chance we are wrong. Otherwise there would be no room for faith.”² “The existence of God cannot be demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt for the simple reason that religious belief refers to something objectively real.”³

In matters of fact, therefore, we are to seek for converging lines of evidence. We are to be mindful of Butler’s famous aphorism that probable proofs “by being added, not only increase the evidence but multiply it.”⁴

Trueblood argues that we must apply the scientific method in religion as elsewhere. We must take the four steps of this method, “observation, hypothesis, implication and verification.”⁵ Doing this we shall find that there is analogy between belief in God and belief in anything else.

Having shown that faith is a necessity in any field we now ask which faith we are to hold.⁶ To answer this question we inquire which items of faith “are most in accordance with the facts or most faithful to experience.”⁷ A difficulty then arises. There is no agreement on the question of fact. “What some call facts others call fictions and what seem to some men to be veridical experiences seem to other men to be hallucinations or illusions.”⁸ Thus “our dependence on facts turns out to be somewhat pathetic, since we do not know any facts at all except as they are involved in the experience of men.”⁹ And “the conclusion to be reached, in view of our individual mental poverty is that we cannot avoid reliance on some sort of authority.”¹⁰ But this is no disgrace.

¹ p. 293.

² p. 36.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ p. 41.

⁵ p. 43.

⁶ p. 65.

⁷ p. 66.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ p. 67.

All of us depend on the authority of a doctor sometimes.¹¹ So why should there be no authority in religion? There is, to be sure, no infallible authority.¹² Instead we depend upon the authority of the expert. Dependence on such authority “is itself the path of reason.”¹³ It only indicates that we want “disciplined insight.”¹⁴ We want this in other sciences. Why should we not look for it in religion? Why should not the saints tell us of that in which they are experts? Saints have that “tenderness of spirit”¹⁵ which entitles them to a special hearing. And, in any case, we can test that which we are told for ourselves, “since each man may have the direct knowledge of God in his own experience.”¹⁶ “The heart of religion,” it should always be remembered, “is not an information about God but experience of God.”¹⁷

We are now ready to proceed to a choice of faiths. In the first place it is evident that “we cannot return to the naive spiritualism which satisfied our ancestors for so many generations. The existence of natural science renders this general conception of the world untenable.”¹⁸ In the second place “we cannot, with intellectual integrity, adopt a system as demonstrably inadequate and self-defeating as philosophical naturalism is.”¹⁹ We must therefore “press forward to some genuine synthesis.”²⁰ This synthesis the author finds in what he calls “theistic realism.”²¹ Theistic realism has already “won the assent of sensitive minds.”²² “The religion of maturity”²³ cannot rest except in a God “who is at once the union of genuine power and perfect love.”²⁴ God must at least be personal though he may be more than personal.²⁵ We are justified in holding then that the belief in a God who at least is personal is a reasonable belief. In fact we hold that such a belief is the hypothesis that best explains the facts of experience. “The hypothesis is that the kind of order we know best, the order of purposive mind, is the ultimate explanation of the order of the universe.”²⁶

We test this hypothesis at four points: with respect to nature, to moral experience, to aesthetic experience, and to religious experience. A word must be said about each.

If science shows the world is intelligible, at least to a considerable degree, “science becomes a witness to intelligent Purpose in nature.”²⁷ The phenomena of moral

¹¹ p. 69.

¹² p. 71.

¹³ p. 72.

¹⁴ p. 75.

¹⁵ p. 81.

¹⁶ p. 82.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ p. 116.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ p. 117.

²² p. 118.

²³ p. 131.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ p. 137.

²⁶ p. 138.

²⁷ p. 148.

experience again corroborate our belief in God. There is an objective reference inherent in all ethical judgment.²⁸ And nothing tangible can furnish this objective reference. It must refer to God “who is the Purposive Intelligence revealed in the actual world, but not identical with it.”²⁹ The “augustness of ought” is inexplicable except on a theistic basis.³⁰ And “the paradox of freedom” points in the same direction.³¹

Aesthetic experience furnishes another independent line of evidence. There is “the objectivity of beauty”³² about which there can really be no serious dispute; and there is “the sense of communication”³³ which points to unity of reference. Then, too, “the reverence which so many feel in noble scenes is not intelligible or defensible on any other than theistic grounds.”³⁴

Finally we turn to religious experience as evidence for the reasonableness of our faith in God. Millions of men have reported that they have known God indirectly. This is in itself no absolute proof that they have really done so.³⁵ We ought therefore to have the attitude of pure agnosticism so well exemplified by Romanes.³⁶ Our golden text should be, “Sit down before fact as a little child.”³⁷ We take the reported experiences and deal with them scientifically. We consider the number³⁸ and the quality³⁹ of the reporters as well as the agreement of the reports,⁴⁰ and “the difference it makes.”⁴¹ Our conclusion is that the hypothesis of God is based on so much evidence that it is well-nigh impossible not to believe in his existence. “The miracle of coincidence is so great that it is bound to be unacceptable to thoughtful persons.”⁴²

By means of these four independent lines of evidence, each containing several independent strands, we are prepared to give a sympathetic ear to the story of history and in particular to the words of Jesus. “There is good reason to suppose that He plumbed the depths of the human spirit more fully than any who has ever lived. As the Fourth Evangelist so cryptically puts it, ‘He knew what was in man.’”⁴³ We do well to pay attention to the testimony of this “Supreme Expert.”⁴⁴ Jesus “believed implicitly in the existence of God as His Father.”⁴⁵ We need not concern ourselves with the author’s

²⁸ p. 164.

²⁹ p. 166.

³⁰ p. 169.

³¹ p. 172.

³² p. 179.

³³ p. 187.

³⁴ p. 193.

³⁵ p. 197.

³⁶ p. 63.

³⁷ p. 62.

³⁸ p. 206.

³⁹ p. 208.

⁴⁰ p. 210.

⁴¹ p. 211.

⁴² p. 214.

⁴³ p. 218.

⁴⁴ p. 219.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

discussion of difficulties that face him who would believe in God. The material adduced is, we believe, sufficient to give a fair sample of the nature of his argument as a whole.

“Belief in God,” Trueblood says, “is rationally supported by the combination of several lines of converging evidence, each having nearly the same importance. They amount to a much closer approximation to proof, when considered together than could be supposed by considering them separately, since, as Butler said in an aphorism already quoted, ‘Probable proofs, by being added, not only increase the evidence, but multiply it.’”⁴⁶

We can well appreciate the general acceptance of a position such as Trueblood offers. Here is a position that is not in any sense extreme. Trueblood argues against the subjectivists, the naturalists and the mechanists. He believes in a God who is “an independent center of consciousness, with his own unique life and purposes, with a differential activity of his own.”⁴⁷ He believes in “The Living God” and at the same time in the commonly accepted conclusions of modern science. The argument for the position, too, appears, at first sight, to be eminently reasonable. It appeals to “‘the spontaneous creed of the natural man.’”⁴⁸ It abhors a priorism. It does not rest too heavily on any individual argument; it wants to be convinced by nothing less than an overwhelming convergence of evidence. It sits before a fact as does a little child and has at the same time a decent respect for the law of non-contradiction.

However, it must be said that the position is held at the expense of a certain vagueness. This is apparent especially in the concept of God that is entertained. Trueblood seeks to defend the real existence of God. Throughout, he argues against subjectivism. He argues that though our ideas are and must be subjective they can none the less have an objective reference.⁴⁹ At the same time it is said that such a statement is epistemological rather than ontological. “That is, it says nothing whatever about the constitution of objects.”⁵⁰ We are not altogether surprised then when we are told—without argument—that religion consists not in information about God but in experience of God,⁵¹ while yet we are also told that the religious experience is cognitive “in that it claims to be the kind of perception which gives the perceiver actual knowledge of God.”⁵² Again we are told that in Christianity we have clearly and unambiguously arrived at the notion of God as personal,⁵³ while yet it is said that God may be “more than personal.”⁵⁴ The “living God,” who is at least personal and possibly super-personal is also said to be other than, while yet not inconsistent with, the “It” which Aristotle called his god.⁵⁵ Then, too, it must be remembered that we cannot be certain that this God exists.⁵⁶ But if

⁴⁶ p. 308.

⁴⁷ p. 132.

⁴⁸ p. 54.

⁴⁹ p. 61.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ p. 82.

⁵² p. 202.

⁵³ p. 134.

⁵⁴ p. 137.

⁵⁵ p. 134.

⁵⁶ p. 42.

he exists he is limited “by the conditions of goodness.”⁵⁷ This goodness seems to be an abstract principle independent of God while yet it also seems to be the goodness of God. The same holds true of the idea of “divine Purpose.” It seems to be used personally and yet impersonally or, perhaps, super-personally. The world-order is accounted for “by reference to the constancy of divine Purpose.” This fact is said to remove the usual obstacles offered against the doctrine of Providence, the effectiveness of prayer and the concept of miracle.⁵⁸ How this can be done is not clear. Is Providence the activity of God or is it a name for a principle supposedly active in a self-existent universe? Do we pray to God or do we pray to a super-personal principle? Or are we praying at the same time to the personal and the super-personal God? Is miracle an act of the limited personal God or is it an extraordinary sort of event somehow related to the impersonal idea of Purpose?

All this vagueness is not sufficient to conceal the real sympathies of the author. Indeed the vagueness itself indicates the fact that Trueblood, and those who think like him, do not want the Scriptural idea of the absolute personality of God. The Scriptural idea of God is such as to allow for no uncertainty of his existence. His existence is certain because no other existence has meaning without it. His existence as absolutely personal is the presupposition of the meaning of anything else that exists. Hence his counsel controls “whatsoever comes to pass.” There is no abstract law of non-contradiction in accord with which as a pattern or as a rule of possibility God makes or does not make the universe. He is himself the source of significant possibility. Finite personality and its choices have significance not by virtue of the limitation of his counsel, but by virtue of its unlimited character. It may be objected, however, that Trueblood reaches his conclusion fairly enough. Unless we can point to major flaws in his reasoning, such a position as he holds seems to be that to which we are logically bound. Our answer is that the argument is indeed conclusive on the basis of the premises accepted. We have nothing but admiration for the breadth of conception and the consistency of the argument. Our difficulty lies with the premises accepted.

Trueblood assumes at the outset that the world of fact and the world of definition are basically independent of one another. He holds that certainty can arise only in conclusions that are fundamentally hypothetical.⁵⁹ We can have certainty, he says, only by avoiding questions of fact. Hence “the existence of God cannot be demonstrated beyond a shadow of doubt for the simple reason that religious belief refers to something objectively real.”⁶⁰ Now this assumption of the independence of the world of logic and the world of fact involves the rejection of the God of Scripture. The only kind of God which one starting with the assumption mentioned can reach is a God who finds a situation confronting him over which he has no control. He finds, on the one hand, an abstract impersonal law of non-contradiction and, on the other hand, a series of Self-existent facts. Over neither of them does he have any control. He may begin the investigation of facts by the empirical method and, to his amazement, find that, somehow, facts do to an extent operate in consonance with abstract law. He may call this Providence and “divine Purpose.” When he sees a particularly strange event fit somehow

⁵⁷ p. 296.

⁵⁸ p. 277.

⁵⁹ p. 34.

⁶⁰ p. 36.

into the general pattern, he may call it a miracle. But if he sees other self-conscious beings prostrate themselves in prayer before him, he will urge them to stand upright since he is of like passions with themselves. With them he would worship abstract principle and self-existent fact, and the marvel of their union. Trueblood's Jesus refuses to be worshiped; there is no reason why his God should not have the same tenderness of feeling. Perhaps he would by a motion and a vote accept the title of "Supreme Expert," but further than that he could not go.

It is a foregone conclusion, then, that only a finite God can issue from reasoning based upon the premises of the two separate worlds of logic and of fact. It is also, we believe, a foregone conclusion that he who begins with the absolute separation of the two worlds must, if consistent, end in despair. The words possibility and impossibility, as well as the words probability and improbability, would deal only with abstractions. They would have no application to the world of fact. In the world of fact literally anything might happen. Science would be the effort to empty the seven seas with a sieve. There would be no converging lines of evidence because there could be no evidence for anything at all.

Again we do not mean to suggest that Trueblood's position is on a lower plane than that of others. We appreciate his efforts to escape mechanism and subjectivism. His position is less openly hostile to Christianity than the avowed process philosophies of Dewey and Whitehead. Yet in the end to miss the train by a minute is as serious as to miss it by an hour. It is only, we believe, in the frank acceptance of the absolute God of Christianity, who controls whatsoever comes to pass, who is the source of possibility and probability, that we can find a foundation for science and an object of worship.

The Doctrine Of God

Albert C. Knudson, Dean of Boston University School of Theology, and Professor of Systematic Theology. *The Doctrine of God*. pp. 434. The Abingdon Press, New York, 1930.

The book before us presents “the first of two independent volumes that together will cover the field of Christian theology.” There are reasons for thinking of this book as of more than usual importance. The doctrine of God is of perennial significance. Yet many recent writers have so completely changed the idea of God that the term as used by them means nothing at all. One can scarcely enter a bookstore without noticing that some new deity is born. Usually these gods are born into the pragmatic family. As the space-time continuum advances in age she becomes the fruitful mother of gods. The immanence-idea is so overworked that it has turned into identity. Any “value” or “ideal” that strikes someone’s fancy is promptly impersonated and deified. If the author of such a deity is a prominent scientist it becomes forthwith a sure token of bigotry to say that such an author is not a Christian or a theist.

In the book of Professor Knudson we meet on the contrary with a serious attempt to take God seriously. Knudson would have transcendence be more than a word. He does not sympathize with the extreme pragmatic tendency of the day. Moreover, he does not wish to build up his theology on just one aspect of human experience. He stresses the equal or perhaps superior value of the volitional as compared to the intellectual aspect of personality but by no means wishes to set the intellectual categories aside in order to find room for faith. His is to be a theology based upon the “logic of the whole personality.” In connection with this it should be said that the author does not fear metaphysics. All of us have some metaphysics or other. The only question is what kind of metaphysics we have. We cannot base our religion on an “as if.” Thus we see that Knudson seeks to give us a well-rounded and metaphysically grounded doctrine of God. As such it is worthy of our serious consideration.

In consonance with the philosophical seriousness of the author is the high religious tone that pervades the book. When one turns, for example, from Bruce Barton or Roy Wood Sellars to Knudson one emerges from a stifling secularism to the mountain air of religion. Such things as these we value highly.

Moreover, the author is a leading representative and exponent of a movement in theology and philosophy that has considerable influence on the Christian church in America. An unpublished doctor’s thesis in the University of Chicago Divinity library by Bernhardt on *Borden Parker Bowne and the Episcopal Church* proves that the philosophy of Bowne has a controlling influence on the Seminaries of the denomination referred to. The writer of this thesis sees a great difference between the old method of instruction and the new method of instruction in these seminaries. The chief difference he finds to be the fact that the new method begins from human experience while the old method began with an assumed authoritarianism of the Scripture. We cannot but agree with Bernhardt that if this difference exists between the old method and the new, it is not a matter of detail or of emphasis. It becomes a question of which method is proper and which is improper for the subject of theology. More than that it becomes a question of which is true and which is false. Knudson maintains that his position in theology, based as it admittedly is upon Bowne’s philosophy, is the logical development of true Christian thought. “Personalism

is par excellence the Christian philosophy of our day.”¹ It is this claim of Knudson that we would call in question. Or if it be granted that personalism is “the most prevalent Christian philosophy of our day” our interest will be to show that this prevalent philosophy is not identical with nor a logical development of Biblical Christianity or, more broadly, traditional theism. And secondly, our criticism may suggest some reasons why traditional theism and the “overcome position” of orthodox Christianity may still be the more defensible philosophy or theology of the two.

In developing our claim that Knudson’s position is a radical departure from instead of a logical development of Christian theism, we are in a very fortunate position for two reasons. In the first place, Knudson himself offers us a definite and to us an entirely acceptable criterion by which to judge a genuine theism. This gives us the advantage of judging the author by his own standard. In the second place, we have the good fortune of being able to refer to the author’s book, *The Philosophy of Personalism*, for a more definite statement of Knudson’s theory of reality and theory of knowledge than could well be given in the book now under discussion. This is especially valuable since we believe that the chief weakness of the book is an antitheistic theory of knowledge.

Beginning with the first point we find that in the chapter our author devotes to the Absoluteness of God, he is very insistent on the necessity of an absolute God. The fundamental demand for unity that marks human thought can be satisfied with nothing less. More than that, the unity that we seek must be a concrete unity. If God is not to be a “ ‘spectral woof of impalpable abstractions or an unearthly ballet of bloodless categories,’ ” he must be personal. An absolute, personal God is the most urgent requirement of rational thought. Of such pivotal significance does Knudson consider this point that he considers belief in such a God the only alternative to skepticism. “Either a theistic Absolute or completely philosophical skepticism would seem to be the alternatives that confront us; and as between the two a healthy reason ought to have no difficulty in making its choice” (p. 250).

We are quite ready to subscribe to Knudson’s alternative. The only alternative to a theory of reality of which God as absolute personality forms the controlling concept is a metaphysical relativism. Of course it is easy to find intellectual difficulties in traditional theism. It is quite customary to reject Biblical theism for no better reason than that we cannot fathom how an absolute God could create the universe or become actually incarnate. To purchase relief from intellectual difficulties in this fashion is too expensive a procedure. Where is the system that has no intellectual difficulties? We do not hold to Christian theism because it has no, or even in the first place because it has less of intellectual difficulty in it than other systems, but because we hold that on the basis of a metaphysical relativism no knowledge whatsoever is possible. Parmenides was quite right when he said of Heraclitus’ flux that if opposites do change into one another completely, there is no abiding subject about which we can say anything. For the Christian theist God is the ultimate subject of all predication. It is not as though we could sacrifice God and retain ourselves. If we sacrifice God we also sacrifice ourselves.

Corresponding to and involved in this theory of reality is an equally theistic theory of knowledge. If God is absolute personality he is completely self-conscious. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. There are no hidden depths of troubled possibility within

¹ *Doctrine of God*, p. 80.

or beyond him. He knoweth the end from the beginning. It is this absolute self-consciousness of God that forms the basis of certainty for our knowledge. Possibility for us is deeper than the deepest sea. If it were so also for God the whole of our coherent experience would be adrift on a shoreless, bottomless void. Our thought would be operating in a vacuum. If there is to be any rationality or coherence anywhere there must be absolute rationality somewhere. Our rationality rests upon God's rationality.

It is this that Christian theism has expressed in its conception of authority. Its view of authority has never been that of mere tradition. If prophets or apostles, if Christ or the Scriptures are said to speak with absolute authority this is said because it is believed that an absolute God speaks in them. If the Scriptures are claimed to be inspired in a unique sense, this doctrine of inspiration is logically connected with the claim of an absolute God. How seldom does one meet with a critic of Christian theism who will even attempt to state fairly the various implications of the conception of an absolute God, as they appear for example in the doctrines of Christ and of the Scriptures, and thereupon assume manfully the epistemological consequences of rejecting all. It is much easier to isolate, for example, the inspiration theory, present it as something mechanical and cast it aside as of no religious significance.

According to the theistic theory of knowledge then, God is one who interprets the meaning of reality to man. Man's mind must be receptive to this interpretation if he is to have any knowledge at all. Man cannot begin his speculation upon facts and thereupon ask whether God exists. If the facts do not exist apart from God, they are the product of his plan. That is, it is then God's interpretation that is prior to the facts. How then could man separate the facts from that interpretation of God? As well could you separate a drop of ink from the ocean. Professor Hocking has given expression to this thought by saying that our God-consciousness must be basic to our experience. If the God-consciousness does not enter at the level of our lowest sensations, says he, it will never enter at all.

If these considerations are true it is an error to suppose that the chief contribution of Christianity to the advancement of speculative thought is the concept of personality as such. Christianity reintroduced the conception of God as Absolute personality primarily and therefore the concept of finite personality; secondarily, Christianity is restorative and supplementative of an original theism; Christianity and theism stand or fall together.

With this brief explanation of the theory of reality and the theory of knowledge of Christian theism we may now ask to what extent Knudson's contention that his theology is a genuine development of traditional theism can receive our assent. To do this we inquire not about the details but only about his theory of reality and his theory of knowledge.

Knudson is keenly aware of the fact that not every type of personalism can furnish the basis of a Christian theistic theology. In order to make it as clear as possible that his personalism is genuinely theistic, he distinguishes it from several other types of personalism. There is first of all the atheistic personalism of men like J. M. E. McTaggart. Then there is the pantheistic personalism of Wm. Stern. These two are clearly antitheistic. But even of the theistic personalisms there are some varieties that are contrary to a true typical theistic personalism. Of these he mentions the absolutistic personalism of the Hegelian school, the relativistic personalism of Charles Renouvier and the purely ethical or teleological personalism of George H. Howison. The absolutistic personalism does injustice to the reality of human personality. Relativistic personalism

might better be called finitism because it will have no absolute at all. Purely ethical or teleological personalism denies the creation of man by God.

These exclusions on the part of Knudson would seem to bring him very near to Biblical theism. He rejects finitism and absolutism because they fail to distinguish between the personality of God and the personality of man. Thus Knudson very clearly means business with the conception of personality. Moreover he rejects any view that wipes out the creation idea. Thus Knudson wants God to be a higher personality than man. But does our author really take seriously the conception of an absolute personality? We are persuaded that he does not.

The author writes a good deal about the prolegomena to theology. Naturally in such a discussion the question of method is important. As to this he tells us that "authoritarianism" is an "overcome standpoint." The infallible inspiration of the Scripture is, he thinks, easily shown untenable by evident errors in the Scripture. Here we could have wished that an eminent systematic theologian should at least not have descended to this easy method. As suggested above we have a right to expect that such doctrines as inspiration shall first be shown in their correlation to the central doctrine of an absolute God before they are lightly cast aside. But let that pass. The main point is that Knudson resolutely sets himself to an empirical investigation of the facts of the religious consciousness of man in order to determine what religion is before he goes to God. The assumption of this method is that the religious consciousness exists and functions or at least can function normally even if no absolute God exists. It is taken as a matter of course that this is the only scientific procedure. But what then of Hocking's demand that the God consciousness must come in at the very beginning of our experience lest it not come in at all? A true theist must make God the highest interpretative category of experience and he cannot do so unless God interprets at the beginning as well as at the end of experience. To say this is not a way "of completely escaping subjectivity,"² as Knudson would have us believe. To have a truly empirical theology it is not necessary first to study religious experience apart from God. The truly theistic position is also the truly empirical position. We may say that Knudson has untheistically isolated human experience from God.

The so-called experiential method is definitely based upon "the autonomous validity of our religious nature."³ Criticizing the view of theology that teaches it as a "*doctrine de deo et rebus divinis*," he tells us that, "It fails to see that in our day theology must be anthropocentric in its starting-point."⁴ So also when the question of the origin of religion is discussed the author finds it a matter of total indifference what the origin of religion may have been. "One might, like the sage of whom Van Hugel tells us, trace the origin of religion back to 'the scratching by a cow of an itch on her back,' and yet not undermine the religious belief of the day; or, on the other hand, one might find the ultimate source of religion in a primitive revelation and yet leave it with as little rational justification as ever."⁵ But surely this is most too strange for words. Only upon the assumption of a complete metaphysical relativism could one make such a statement consistently. If the

² p. 104.

³ p. 225.

⁴ p. 192.

⁵ p. 217.

universe has been created by God, man's religion is dependent upon and even defined by the fact, while if religion might have originated in independence of God its definition cannot, even eventually, be formed by a reference to God.

We would not be understood as saying that for Knudson religion needs no objective reference at all. On the contrary, he tells us that religion "involves a personal attitude toward an objective realm of values."⁶ Again he says, "A submissive, trustful, conciliatory feeling toward the powers that be in the universe is primary in religion."⁷ And once more, "Religion in its essential nature means faith in the rationality and purposiveness of the world."⁸ The point of importance is that for Knudson the "realm of values" need not necessarily be personal. Religion "is unequivocal in attributing supreme worth to the spiritual realm, but whether the transcendent Reality is to be conceived as personal or not is left undecided."⁹ Very definitely then the conception of an absolute God is not a *sine qua non* of true religion for Knudson. It is desirable but not indispensable.

We have now seen that the root of the antitheistic tendency in Knudson's book is his uncritical assumption of the ultimacy of finite personality. When in his work on "The Philosophy of Personalism," he seeks to tell us what the distinguishing characteristics of a true "typical theistic personalism" are, he defines personality in general and afterwards makes his distinctions between human and divine personality. It follows that this method precludes the possibility of ever arriving at the conception of an absolute God. God is then a species of a genus. If there are limitations in the genus they will also be in the species.

It is this fact: that God's personality can be no more than a species of the genus of personality that comes most definitely to the foreground when God's relation to time is discussed. About this our author says little and we wish he had said much. Yet he says something directly and more indirectly which enables us to conclude that for Knudson, as for all other non-theists, the Universe is a more inclusive conception than God. We have already seen that for Knudson religion consists of an attitude toward an ideal realm which is an aspect of the Universe. We may now note that for Knudson man partakes of the essential nature of eternity and on the other hand God partakes of the essential nature of time. As to the former it is involved in the contention that in personality as such, therefore human as well as divine, is contained the final unity that our experience needs.

¹⁰ In the last analysis the finite personality does not need God for knowledge. "The reality of the soul or self or 'I' is the fundamental presupposition of personalism; it is even a more characteristic doctrine than the existence of a personal God."¹¹

But more important, if possible, is the second point that God partakes of the essential nature of time. That this is the case can best be realized if we study Knudson's conceptions of creation and of incarnation. As to creation he makes no very definite statement. He realizes that an eternally necessary creation would lead readily to

⁶ p. 48.

⁷ p. 40.

⁸ p. 42.

⁹ p. 51.

¹⁰ *Philosophy of Personalism*, p. 83.

¹¹ *Philosophy of Personalism*, p. 67.

pantheism. But he thinks that perhaps all the purposes of religion may be served by conceiving of creation as “eternal, yet free and actuated by love.”¹² What this may mean I cannot fathom. More definitely, however, does he tell us that just as it was true that in man as well as in God, one can find the final principle of unity, so it is equally true that in God’s being as well as in man the rationale of change must be found. “If God be thought of as a changeless substance, there would be no way of accounting for the advancing cosmic movement. Changes in the world must be due to changes in its underlying cause. An unchanging cause could produce only an unchanging effect.”¹³ It is difficult to distinguish such a view from an outspoken metaphysical relativism. Time is made an ingredient element in God as well as in man; the absoluteness of God has disappeared.

In more direct connection with Christianity, the same inherent temporalism appears in the author’s view of the incarnation. He tells us that no religious purpose is served by the Chalcedonian creed which endeavored to keep from intermixture the temporal and the eternal. The “impersonal manhood” of Christ by which the Church sought to safeguard the transfusion of God and man has for Knudson no significance. “We find it simpler and more satisfactory to think of him as ‘a human personality completely and abidingly interpenetrated by God’s indwelling.’ ”¹⁴ If now in this connection it be realized that Christ is considered to be no less divine for his being a “human personality,” it becomes still more difficult to call Knudson’s position Christian or theistic, and to distinguish it from metaphysical finitism.

It is upon the basis of this metaphysical relativism that Christianity is regarded as standing in no more than a climactic relation to other religions.¹⁵ Christ is no longer the incarnate Son of God suffering in his assumed human nature for the sins of man, but God himself in the human person of Christ is the “chief of burdenbearers.”¹⁶ If this is not to mean that God is responsible for evil it must mean that evil is at least as original as God in which case one has a finite god. And this accords with the author’s statement that the “unsurpassability” of Christianity has no more religious significance for us.¹⁷ This is true if God as well as we are brethren fighting side by side against an evil that exists independently of both in a Universe that is greater than both. Finally in the last chapter, on the Trinity, the author once more reveals to us that, to him, God is brought down into the temporal flux. He says, and we believe rightly so, that the Christian church has in its doctrine of the Trinity not a useless *super-additum*, but that it forms the foundation of philosophy and theology. In the Trinity unity and plurality live in eternal harmony. But now note that according to Knudson one of the members of the Trinity is or may be a “human personality.” Thus the diversity factor consists of a temporal element. The unity is no more than a unity within a Universe that is inclusive of both time and eternity, of both God and man. Knudson has thought to make the Trinity do genuine philosophic service by bringing it very close to us, but he has brought it so close to us that it does us

¹² *Doctrine of God*, p. 369.

¹³ *Doctrine of God*, p. 316.

¹⁴ *Doctrine of God*, p. 421.

¹⁵ p. 109.

¹⁶ p. 413.

¹⁷ p. 114.

no service at all. Worse than that, Knudson has brought the Trinity into the flux with the result that no unity of any sort can ever be obtained.

In conclusion, let us note again that the author's doctrines about the Incarnation and the Trinity followed necessarily from his experiential starting-point. If you begin your investigation of religion by assuming that finite personality has within itself sufficient unifying power so that it need make no reference to an absolute God at the outset, the reference made at the conclusion will be no more than a polite bow to a name. For Knudson, man is the standard of truth while for Christian theism, God is the standard of truth.

Kant Or Christ?

The late Dr. Shailer Matthews was lecturing on Christian Ethics. An orthodox student asked the question whether, in discussing the Ethics of Jesus, it were necessary to inquire into his claim to divinity. Dr. Matthews replied in some such words as these: "If you have some dentistry or plumbing done you do not ask the dentist or the plumber to explain to you the technique of plumbing or of dentistry." "True," answered the orthodox student in turn, "but if I am the man with the toothache I want to know whether it is a plumber or a dentist that is working at my teeth."

Dr. Matthews' position may, I suppose, be said to be fairly typical of modern theology in general. Modern theology is, generally speaking, opposed to metaphysics. It has been informed by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

1. The Pervasive Influence Of Kant

Sir Arthur Eddington, in speaking of the philosophy of physical science tells us that "the physical universe is defined as the theme of a specified body of knowledge, just as Mr. Pickwick might be defined as the hero of a specified novel."¹ "A great advantage of this definition," says Eddington, "is that it does not prejudge the question whether the physical universe—or Mr. Pickwick—really exists."² He illustrates his position by telling us of an ichthyologist. This ichthyologist explores the life of the ocean. "Surveying his catch, he proceeds in the usual manner of a scientist to systematize what it reveals. He arrives at two generalizations: (1) No sea-creature is less than two inches long. (2) All sea-creatures have gills."³ In explanation he adds: "Anything uncatchable by my net is *ipso facto* outside the scope of ichthyological knowledge, and is not part of the kingdom of fishes which has been defined as the theme of ichthyological knowledge. In short, what my net can't catch isn't fish."⁴ The ichthyologist is not interested in "an objective kingdom of fishes." Eddington's position is, we believe, fairly typical of modern science in general. Modern science too has been informed by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

John Dewey's *The Quest for Certainty* contains a running argument against the notion of "antecedent being." "There are no conceivable ways in which the existence of ultimate unchangeable substances which interact without undergoing change in themselves can be reached by means of experimental operations. Hence they have no empirical, no experimental standing; they are pure dialectic inventions."⁵ For Dewey scientific objects are "statistically standardized correlations of existential changes."⁶ Dewey's position is, we believe, fairly typical of modern philosophy in general. Once more modern

¹ *The Philosophy of Physical Science*, p. 3.

² p. 3.

³ p. 16.

⁴ p. 16.

⁵ p. 118.

⁶ *The Philosophy of John Dewey*, in *The Library of Living Philosophers*, Volume 1, p. 578.

philosophy, like modern religion and modern science, has been informed by the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

2. God The Ultimate Interpreter

We are not surprised then that Professor Albert Einstein finds no difficulty in harmonizing science and religion: a positivist science and a positivist religion ought to be good friends. Nor is it any marvel that he should reject the notion of a personal God; only a religion without God fits in with a science that has no God. Indeed one of the great virtues of the frankly positivist positions of Matthews, Eddington, Dewey and Einstein is that it makes the issue between historic Christianity and modern thought so plain that he who runs may read it. "Tenderminded" Idealists and Realists of various schools befuddle this issue. They speak of some sort of antecedent being. They still speak of some sort of structure in the universe which the human mind finds as a *datum*. This might, on the surface, seem to make them sympathetic to a Christian point of view. It takes the "tough-minded" Selective Subjectivist to reject the "objective kingdom of fishes" altogether, the "tough-minded" Pragmatist to assure us that data are taken not given, and the "tough-minded" Relativist to inform us that a truly religious person occupies himself with thoughts, feelings, and aspirations to which he clings because of their "super-personal value." Historic Christianity should expect no pity from the followers of Immanuel Kant.

With more or less consistency the followers of Kant ascribe, by implication if not otherwise, ultimate definitory power to the mind of man. Christianity, on the other hand, ascribes ultimate definitory power to the mind of God. What Eddington ascribes to man, the power of exhaustive dialectification of significant reality, Christianity ascribes to God. The God of Christianity has identified and does identify by exhaustive description. He has exhausted all classification so that for him the *infima species* and the individual are identical. In modern science, in modern philosophy and in modern religion a would-be autonomous man wields the 'Logician's postulate' in sovereign fashion denying significant reality to that which has not been trimmed on his Procrustean Bed. There is no no-man's land of neutrality between these two positions. Two "Creators" stand face to face in mortal combat. Two minds, each claiming to define fact before the other can meet fact stand squarely opposed to one another. If Christianity is true, the "facts" are what God says they must be; if the Kantian position is true, the "facts" are what man says they must be. The method employed by modern science, philosophy and religion does not seek to find God's structure in the facts of the universe. Man's structural activity is itself made the ultimate source of significant predication. The rejection of the God of Christianity is the prerequisite of the acceptance of current scientific, philosophical and religious methodology. There cannot be two ultimate interpreters. The orthodox position makes God, the modern position makes man the ultimate interpreter of reality.

3. Tillich And Niebuhr Both Kantian

The issue seems clearer than ever. Unfortunately there are those on the modern and there are those on the orthodox side who obscure the issue anew. By the way of illustration I point to Tillich, Niebuhr and Barth on the modern and to Romanism on the orthodox side.

In his criticism of Einstein's recent article in *The Union Review* Professor Paul Tillich discusses four points. Says he: "Einstein attacks the idea of a personal God from four angles: The idea is not essential for religion. It is the creation of primitive superstition. It is self-contradictory. It contradicts the scientific world view."⁷ In his reply Tillich assumes with Kant that the phenomenal world is self-existent and self-operative. He believes in a personal God but in a personal God who is finite. He employs the Kantian form of argument against the idea of a God "interfering with natural events or being." In short the sort of God Tillich believes in ought to be quite unobjectionable to Einstein. It were better to draw the issue simply and plainly as Einstein does.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr's writings seem at first blush to clarify rather than obscure the issue. Niebuhr seeks to distinguish the Christian from the classical-modern view of man. He does not hesitate to say that the classical view "is determined by Greek metaphysical presuppositions" and that "the Christian view is determined by the ultimate presuppositions of Christian faith."⁸ In a recent article in *The Union Review* he says: "the one element in modern culture which gives it unity and cohesion in all of its variety and contradictions is its rejection of the Christian doctrine of original sin." For all this we are grateful indeed. Yet at the critical moment Niebuhr himself accepts the classical-modern rather than the Christian view of man. Niebuhr's criticisms on naturalism and idealism are in themselves exceedingly fine. These criticisms might on the surface seem to commit him to the doctrine of a self-sufficient God and the Christian doctrine of sin. Yet such is, we are forced to hold, not the case. Niebuhr's position is similar to that of Kierkegaard! Kierkegaard, he argues, has taught us how to bridge the impassable gulf between "ideas" and "facts" presupposed by both naturalism and idealism. He has done so with his notion of the self, the Individual. This Individual, he argues, unifies within himself true universality and true particularity.⁹ We reply that Kierkegaard's Individual is but the *homo noumenon* of Kant in modern dress. It is the personification of the ideal the autonomous man sets for himself.

4. Niebuhr Rejects Causal Creation

We are, accordingly, not surprised to find Niebuhr rejecting what he calls "literalistic errors" on the question of origins. "The relation of man's essential nature to his sinful state cannot be solved within terms of the chronological version of the perfection before the Fall. It is, as it were, a vertical rather than horizontal relation. When the Fall is made an event in history rather than a symbol of an aspect of every historical moment in the life of man, the relation of evil to goodness in that moment is obscured."¹⁰ But if the "literalistic errors" are to be rejected the naturalistic and idealistic errors, against which Niebuhr has so vigorously protested, must be accepted.

The error of the naturalist, argues Niebuhr, is to regard causality as the principle of meaning.¹¹ But without causal creation by a God of self-contained meaning the world of

⁷ *The Union Review*, November, 1940, p. 8.

⁸ *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Vol. I. Human Nature*, p. 12.

⁹ *Human Nature*, p. 263.

¹⁰ *Idem*, p. 269.

¹¹ p. 134.

causality is what the naturalist says it is, a world without meaning. The “vitalities of history”¹² then have in them power to defy forever the “structure” that “God” may seek to impose upon them. It is true enough that naturalistic interpretations “do not understand the total stature of freedom in which human life stands” and that they are unable “to appreciate the necessity of a trans-historical norm for historical life.”¹³ It is equally true, however, that Niebuhr, in rejecting causal creation, retains a naturalistically interpreted world which must artificially be brought into relationship with the world of the “trans-historical.”

The error of the idealist, argues Niebuhr, is that he has a God of pure form, of abstract structure. But a God who is not the causal Creator of the world can be nothing more than pure Form. We may impersonate this Form but all the bellows of our imagination cannot give it life. “Formless stuff” and “abstract law” are the only alternative to causal creation.

5. Also Barth Denies God’s Self-Sufficiency

What then does Niebuhr offer us that is better than the “idolatry” of naturalism and the “idolatry” of idealism? He offers us a combination of these idolatries. For all his criticism on naturalistic and idealistic “idolatries” he yet turns these “idolatries” into subordinate principles which, for him, are true in their place. “Naturalism” and “idealism” are after all thought to be right as far as they go. The “ultra-rational foundations and presuppositions” of the Christian faith will, according to Niebuhr, have to accord with the presuppositions of naturalism and idealism.

Niebuhr keeps the “ultra-rational” principles within proper bounds, within bounds that the “autonomous individual” can readily allow. The contrast between the classical-modern and the Biblical view of man has after all been effected. The superrationalistic dimensionalism that comes forth from the crucible of this procedure may be said to be “nearer to the Christian faith and a more perverse corruption of it” than either naturalism or idealism.

A theology that is based on the *Critique of Pure Reason* can do no justice either to the idea of God or to the idea of man. It would be simpler and more true to fact if Tillich and Niebuhr would follow the example of Eddington, Dewey, and Einstein. The same thing holds true with respect to Karl Barth. Barth’s challenge to “modern Protestantism” is to be taken *cum grano*. Modern Protestantism is modern; it is Kantian. So is Barth. The underlying epistemological and metaphysical presuppositions of Barth and of “modern Protestantism” alike are found in the critical philosophy of Kant. The quarrels between them are but family quarrels soon to be mended when anyone comes with the challenge of a self-sufficient God. Barth’s ire does not rise to the fulness of its power till he is face to face with the doctrine of the sovereign God. With the help of Kant he brings down this God to the position of correlativity with a self-existent temporal flux. We conclude that such men as Tillich, Niebuhr and Barth obscure the issues that face modern man.

¹² p. 142.

¹³ p. 164.

6. The Fundamental Issue

From the orthodox side the issue is also obscured. It is obscured in particular by the adherents of Scholastic theology. To go back from Kant to St. Thomas and back from St. Thomas to Aristotle offers no help. Professor Etienne Gilson, for all his brilliant effort, can find no harmony between a philosophy based on autonomous reason and a theology based on revelation.

Protestant apologists have been all too ready to follow the Scholastic line. Bishop Butler's *Analogy* and the many books based on it still cater to autonomous reason. But for all this obscurity both on the part of the modern and the orthodox theologians the issue is at bottom simple and clear. A consistent Christianity, such as we must humbly hold the Reformed Faith to be, must set an interpretation of its own over against modern science, modern philosophy and modern religion. Its thinking is controlled, at every point, by the presuppositions of the existence of the self-sufficient God of which the Bible speaks. It is upon the basis of this presupposition alone, the Reformed Faith holds, that predication of any sort at any point has relevance and meaning. If we may not presuppose such an "antecedent" Being, man finds his speck of rationality to be swimming as a mud-ball in a bottomless and shoreless ocean.

Reason, which on Kantian basis has presumed to legislate for the whole of reality, needs chance for its existence. If reality were God-structured the human mind could not be ultimately legislative. The idea of brute irrationality is presupposed in modern methodology. At the same time it is this brute irrationality which undermines every interpretative endeavor on the part of would-be autonomous man. There is on the modern basis no possibility of the identification of any fact let alone the possibility of finding an intelligent relationship of one fact to another fact. The possibility of science and philosophy as well as the possibility of theology presupposes the idea of a God whose counsel determines "whatsoever comes to pass." Only then has the spectre of brute fact and ultimate irrationality been slain. If we are to follow the method of modern science, modern philosophy and modern theology Merlin will never walk the earth again. Modern thought is, like the Prodigal Son, at the swine-trough, but, unlike the Prodigal, it will not return to the Father's house.

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¹Van Til, Cornelius ; Sigward, Eric H.: *The Works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1987*.
electronic ed. New York : Labels Army Co., 1997