

For Niebuhr, religion has to do with "the dimension of depth" in human life. The human spirit, he argues, is able to apprehend, but not to comprehend, this "total dimension." Thus "[t]he human mind is forced to relate all finite events to causes and consummations beyond themselves," and it "constantly conceives all particular things in their relation to the totality of reality," which it can adequately apprehend "only in terms of a principle of unity 'beyond, behind, and above the passing flux of things' (Whitehead)." Mythical, or prophetic, religion is the only adequate way of expressing this "sense of depth and transcendence." Insofar as such religion seeks to discover the relation of the rich variety of facts and events in life and history to "basic causes and ultimate meanings," without carefully examining their relation to one another in the web of cause-effect relationships in the natural world itself, it is simply "pre-scientific thinking." "But mythical thought is not only pre-scientific; it is also supra-scientific. It deals with vertical aspects of reality which transcend the horizontal relationships which science analyzes, charts and records. [It] refers to the transcendent source and end of existence without abstracting it from existence" (*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*: 66, 25 ff.).

Significantly, however, Niebuhr is also clear that "[t]he full dimension of depth in which all human actions transpire is disclosed only in introspection." "To an external observer," he says, "no conscious choice of evil is ever discernible." But "common-sense moral judgments never adopt the scientific account of a moral act consistently. They always introduce the factor of freedom and responsibility, which the act of the other does not disclose to the observer, but which the latter adds from his own introspective experience" (80 f. Note, incidentally, the use of the term "introspective experience," which evidently implies a relatively broad meaning of "experience" and suggests that "introspection" is not something other than "experience," but a certain mode or kind of it.)

There is no question, then, that at these two points, also, Niebuhr's view closely converges with mine.

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