

ON SCIENCE, MORALITY, AND RELIGION

Could it be that there is an important truth, after all, in the Kantian-Ritschlian-Herrmannian-Bultmannian tradition in its tendency to assimilate religion and morality, or, in any case, to interpret our moral experience as the real "point of contact" for the religious question?

If one holds, as I do, that the Kantian "primacy of the practical reason" can and should be reconceived in terms of the Whiteheadian "primacy of experience in the mode of causal efficacy"; and if one further holds, accordingly, that our moral experience is precisely experience in this primary mode, then one may argue that morality does have a preferred position in relation to religion. For it is in morality, or in our moral experience, that we most directly and immediately experience ourselves as effectively influenced by others (the past) and as, in turn, effectively influencing them (the future). Thus insofar as science is considered, not as a human activity (for when it is so considered, it, too, is included under morality), but from the standpoint of the mode of experience it primarily involves, it is less directly related to religion than morality is. Our moral experience directly discloses what our scientific experience discloses only indirectly--namely, ordinary fragmentary existence "in itself", as distinct from its "phenomenal appearance," or, in Whiteheadian terms, its "presentational objectification." To this extent, morality is more fundamental than science, and hence closer to religion, even though, having to do only with ordinary fragmentary existence (i.e., ourselves and others) as distinct from extraordinary, integral existence (i.e., the whole), morality is not as fundamental as religion.

To follow up this line of thought would seem to require something like the following improvement on the scheme suggested by Collingwood in discussing "Religion, Science, and Philosophy" (Faith and Reason, 89-92):

Whereas science is like philosophy in being theoretical rather than practical, religion is like philosophy in being concerned with the whole as distinct from the parts. Morality, then, is like science in being concerned with the parts, as distinct from the whole, but like religion in being practical rather than theoretical. Thus, as concerned with the parts rather than the whole, morality is on the same level as science, as contrasted with both religion and philosophy. But, as practical rather than theoretical, morality is on the same level as religion, as contrasted with both science and philosophy. (Of course, "level" as used in the last two sentences is systematically ambiguous in the same way as in Hartshorne's title, "Two Levels of Faith and Reason." In the one case, "level" is construed by the distinction between part and whole, in the other, by the distinction between practical and theoretical, which may be rather better expressed in terms of the Whiteheadian distinction between the two modes of perception and of "direct recognition," or in terms of the existentialist distinction between "existential" and "reflective.")

Also worth reflecting on in this connection is Whitehead's statement that "morals and religion arise as aspects of this human impetus towards the best in each occasion. . . . Morality emphasizes the detailed occasion; while religion emphasizes the unity of ideal inherent in the universe" (Modes of Thought, 39). If I understand this correctly, its meaning could be

expressed in the terms Whitehead himself elsewhere employs by saying: morality emphasizes self and others, while religion emphasizes the whole. Putting it this way--in terms of two different "emphases"--has the great value of making clear that, in a sense, morality and religion both cover the same ground, albeit with respectively different foci. Because self, others, and the whole are mutually implicative, there can at most be a difference of emphasis between those modes of human response--or those "perspectives"--appropriate to them.

Among the other things such a view helps to explain are (i) the metaphysical character of moral principles; and (ii) the moral character of metaphysical principles. On the assumptions that metaphysics is the theoretical moment of religion (understood broadly as a human mode of response) and that religion implies morality even as morality implies religion, these two conclusions are inescapable.

The question may also be asked whether this analysis does not significantly connect with H. R. Niebuhr's distinction between "objective" and "interpersonal" truth (or "impersonal" and "personal" truth) (RMWC, 46). Likewise, one may suspect that it definitely connects with Bultmann's analysis in "Kirche und Lehre im Neuen Testament": "'Doctrine' can be the explication of that understanding of the world in which I always already stand insofar as the world is on hand for me and I am on hand in it. In this case doctrine involves the transmission and acceptance of knowledge of facts or knowledge of principles. With respect to this type of doctrine which, in relation to what is taught, is purely accidental and secondary, understanding has the character of 'seeing,' or of observing at a distance. Or, alternatively, doctrine opens up to me a possibility of my own existence, which I myself must lay hold of in decision, and thus teaches me to understand myself anew. This it does either as direct address or as indirect address, which latter, in turn, can take place either through theoretical explication of my self-understanding or through the communication of facts. With respect to this type of doctrine, which itself belongs to what is taught, understanding has the character of 'hearing,' of knowing oneself to be addressed, or of decision" (GV, I, 160).

Finally, consider the following passage from William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience, 377 ff.:

" . . . as long as we deal with the cosmic and the general, we deal only with the symbols of reality, but as soon as we deal with private and personal phenomena as such, we deal with realities in the completest sense of the term. . . .

"The world of our experience consists at all times of two parts, an objective and a subjective part, of which the former may be incalculably more extensive than the latter, and yet the latter can never be omitted or suppressed. The objective part is the sum total of what so ever at any given time we may be thinking of, the subjective part is the inner 'state' in which the thinking comes to pass. What we think of may be enormous,--the cosmic times and places, for example,--whereas the inner state may be the most fugitive and paltry activity of mind. Yet the cosmic objects, so far as the

experience yields them, are but ideal pictures of something whose existence we do not inwardly possess but only point at outwardly, while the inner state is our very experience itself; its reality and that of our experience are one. A conscious field plus its object as felt or thought of plus an attitude towards the object plus the sense of a self to whom the attitude belongs--such a concrete bit of personal experience may be a small bit, but it is a solid bit as long as it lasts; not hollow, not a mere abstract element of experience, such as the 'object' is when taken all alone. It is a full fact, even though it be an insignificant fact; it is of the kind to which all realities whatsoever must belong; the motor currents of the world run through the like of it; it is on the line connecting real events with real events. That unshareable feeling which each one of us has of the pinch of his individual destiny as he privately feels it rolling out on fortune's wheel may be disparaged for its egotism, may be sneered at as unscientific, but it is the one thing that fills up the measure of our concrete actuality, and any would-be existent that should lack such a feeling, or its analogue, would be a piece of reality only half made up. [Footnote: Compare Lotze's doctrine that the only meaning we can attach to the notion of a thing as it is 'in itself' is by conceiving it as it is for itself, i.e., as a piece of full experience with a private sense of 'pinch' or inner activity of some sort going with it.]

"If this be true, it is absurd for science to say that the egotistic elements of experience should be suppressed. The axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places,--they are strung upon it like so many beads. To describe the world with all the various feelings of the individual pinch of destiny, all the various spiritual attitudes, left out from the description--they being as describable as anything else--would be something like offering a printed bill of fare as the equivalent for a solid meal. Religion makes no such blunder. . . .

". . . I think, therefore, that however particular questions connected with our individual destinies may be answered, it is only by acknowledging them as genuine questions and living in the sphere of thought which they open up, that we become profound. But to live thus is to be religious; so I unhesitatingly repudiate the survival-theory of religion, as being founded on an egregious mistake. It does not follow, because our ancestors made so many errors of fact and mixed them with their religion, that we should therefore leave off being religious at all. By being religious we establish ourselves in possession of ultimate reality at the only points at which reality is given us to guard. Our responsible concern is with our private destiny, after all."

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