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SEARCH FOR ABSOLUTE VALUE IN RELIGIONS AND PHILOSOPHY

1. Introduction

Religions and philosophy are, by their very nature, the branches of human knowledge which are predominantly concerned with value.¹ What value is in itself, and what it is as related to particular actions, events, and objects are debatable issues.² Yet we might readily accept that value is something which leads to attaining a goal, a goal which is very important for human nature.

Religions and Philosophy deal with such a goal and are the means to it more specifically than any other sciences. However, looking at the world, with its diversity of religions, enormous at the present time and not less diversified than in the past, we may draw the conclusion that man simply cannot decide what position to take with regard to them and, consequently, with regard to values which they proclaim.

A similar position, if not worse might be suggested by philosophy which seems to be so diversified that one finally questions what philosophy is and what its tasks are, and receives contradictory answers. He is told that the task of Philosophy is to philosophize—when he does not even know what philosophy is.

1. See S.A. Matczak *Philosophy: Its Nature, Methods and Basic Sources* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1975), p. 8. J.F. Mitros, *Religions: A select, Classified Bibliography* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1973), p. 6.

2. A select bibliography on this subject: see S.A. Matczak, *Philosophy: A Select, Classified Bibliography of Ethics, Economics, Law, Politics, Sociology* (Louvain: Nauwelaerts, 1970), pp. 61-67. W. James, *Some Problems in Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), pp. 135-146. *Unification Thought* (New York: Unification Thought Institute, 1973), pp. 209-230.

Thus, the question easily arises whether or not there is any agreement at all among intellectuals and peoples in both fields. We think that such an agreement exists, particularly in religions and might exist in philosophy. Thus, values, including absolute ones, do exist recognizable and objectively supportable.

2. Value-Concept in Religions

When we look at the religions, their variety is very striking indeed. The religions of the past and contemporary worlds are so numerous that we do not even know the names of many of them. Their beliefs and rituals appear so surprising that they provoke widely differing reactions in different thinkers. Some admire them and greatly respect them, others reject them with indignation, still others look at them with amusement. Such reactions are not only shared by primitive or less cultured people, but also by highly intellectual and progressive leaders in today's world.

Why these differences among religions and why the differences in attitude among the peoples witnessing them? The answer, I think, is quite obvious. If God really exists and is infinite—not fully grasped by human reason as many philosophers hold—then His worship by a finite being, which man is, cannot be limited to one form. By the very nature of the recognition and acknowledgement of such a Being, the rituals and even the notions concerning this Being will differ. These differences will be reflected in the differences between men and between things of the universe which owe their origin to this Being and are influenced by Him.

However, the differences cannot be so great as not to admit the possibility of certain common features: in the case of religions, we do notice some common basic beliefs. This unity we find, I think, in the belief that there exists a transcendent Being influencing this world, to whom man is responsible.³ This responsibility pertains both to man's life in this world and in the world to come. Besides, man feels that he is somehow obliged to worship this God, that is, to acknowledge his human dependence on Him and

3. See my collective study, *God in Contemporary Thought*, (Washington, D.C.: International Cultural Foundation, 1975). Introduction; Ch. Dawson, *Religion and Culture*, (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), pp. 38-39; A.C. Bouquet, *Comparative Religion* (6th ed. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 194-199.

acknowledge it overtly. Hence, all kinds of rituals, cults, and sacrifices have emerged during the whole history of mankind.

However, for a thinking man, the question which comes up again and again is why such religious events take place. I support the position taken by many others that man *intuitively* feels that some Superior Transcendent Being exists. This intuitive conviction has existed among all mankind from the beginning, all through the centuries down to our times. This feeling is so strong that men are prepared to give up their lives in defence of their religious convictions. I would willingly accept that man's religious conviction flows from *his rational instinct* as described by the great American philosopher, Charles S. Peirce.⁴ This conviction may be analysed and put into rational formulas of discursive or some other kind of reasoning, yet it goes beyond purely theoretical reasoning.

This is the reason why all mankind believes. And when we talk about atheists, the question we have to ask is how many they are and how deeply they are convinced in their minds and hearts about the correctness of their position. We may even ask the question with William James: Whoever proved that God does not exist?⁵

All religions support certain values. This is the basis for their existence. These values are dictated by man's natural conscience or moral feeling and formulated by the teachings of particular religions with the addition of some positive precepts. Here we notice that the general rules of moral practices are almost common, but their applications differ. As a result, we are compelled to support the opinion that there exists some unity in the diversity of moral values; this is a reflection of the unity in the diversity of religions.

3. Value in Philosophy

However, if there is any unity among religions and their support for certain values, this unity seems to be seriously undermined by philosophy. Philosophers are widely divided among

4. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (8 Vols. ed. by Ch. Hartshorne Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. VI, pp. 311-354; *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (ed. by J. Buchlwr. New York: Dover, 1955), pp. 375-378.
5. William James, *The Will to Believe* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1897), Section VIII-X.

themselves in their views on religious as on other things. The danger that philosophy poses for religion lies in the fact that philosophy, by its very nature, regardless of the position of individual philosophers in this matter, proposes to pass judgement on the *rationality* of everything and especially on the things which are most important to the *raison d'être* of man, which is, first of all, man's knowledge of the ultimate reality.

The importance of such a knowledge gets progressively undermined in the minds of Western philosophers and, consequently, in the minds of others. Disagreement concerning the nature of reality led philosophers to question man's capability of knowing. Universal scepticism evidenced already in ancient Pyrrhonism was transformed into the academic scepticism of Hume and his followers. This subtle and scholarly attitude puts in doubt our knowledge of the external world,⁶ even the permanency of one's existence.⁷ Perceptions become recognized as substances themselves.⁸ Consciousness is interpreted as a flux of acts without any underlying support of the same nature.⁹

This intricate, speculative reasoning, which puts in doubt the validity of the reasoning and the deepest conviction of any average thinker, received tremendous support from the epoch-making philosophy of Kant. Here, in spite of his intention, every philosophical effort seems to lead to scepticism in the final analysis or to a sort of irrationalism in the pursuit of consistent reasoning, for the existence of the external world put into question by speculative reason, and accepted as a postulate of practical reason in Kant's philosophical investigations, can be reduced to the condition of speculative reason since practical action is reducible to theoretical awareness of the goal of our activities or of our desire for happiness.

6. G. Berkeley's denial of the existence of the material world, see his "Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous", *The Works of George Berkeley* (ed. by L.C. Fraser, 4 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), Vol. 1, 379-385. D. Hume's Phenomenality of the extra-mental existence, see below foot note, No. 7.

7. D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L.A. Selby Bigge. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), pp. 189-191, 259, 277.

8. *Ibid.*, 13, 16, 233.

9. *Ibid.*, 252, 634-636.

Through his reasoning, rightly or wrongly interpreted, the door has been opened to the denial of the ultimate, transcendent reality. Hegel builds up his system of a new understanding of the reality where men become reduced to a moment of the manifestation of the Absolute, which becomes the ultimate reality of everything and is confined to everything. Nietzsche, with his theory of the 'dead God', pretends to see man as the law-giver and thus he upsets all the values. Marxism reduces all the values to matter and its effects; thus it enhances relativity and the abuses of the powerful in the last analysis.

In the light of these philosophical results, we might ask the question: Is philosophy indeed leading men to a complete disagreement and, thus, not permitting him to reach any common or certain value?

We can answer this question by distinguishing two kinds of philosophies. One is professional philosophy, presented by theoreticians of this sublime and paramount science; the other is the philosophy of a layman. Do these philosophies differ? I think they differ in their theoretical formulation but not in their objective approach to the reality.

Theoretically they differ; we have just indicated the difference. Yet, we might pursue the question and ask why they differ. And, here we have two problems: first, why philosophers differ among themselves; second, what is their relationship to the philosophy of a common man.

To take up the first, namely why professional philosophers differ among themselves. There could be several reasons for this. One reason is the presuppositions in their philosophizing. None of the philosophers wants to admit that his philosophy is based on certain presuppositions. Yet, there is a very doubtful question whether philosophy can exist without presuppositions. With presuppositions are connected specific intentions in their philosophizing. These intentions, as well as presuppositions, are very often hidden. They can be brought to light only by a systematic analysis of the life of the philosophers; sometimes by analysing the content of their philosophy itself. Quite often we find a lack of consistency in a philosopher's system. Those inconsistencies become apparent only when the whole system is taken into account, and not just a part of it.

Another reason for the differences among the philosophers is the different segments of reality which they investigate. None of

the philosophers investigates the whole of reality, although they apply their conclusions to the whole of reality. And here, precisely, lies the source of serious differences.

The investigation of all the reasons for the differences among the philosophers as well as the extent of such differences constitutes a separate science, namely, metaphilosophy, or philosophy of philosophies, which uses as the subject-matter of its investigation particular philosophies and their backgrounds, investigating them under the aspect of unity in diversity. Such a science, which presents quite a difficult task for a researcher, will show the true differences among philosophers, how deep they are, and what the reasons are for supporting them.

Now, what is the relationship of the professional philosophy to the common man's philosophy? It seems that professional philosophy revolves around the common man's philosophy. When professional philosophy becomes too speculative and alienated from the thinking of the ordinary men, after a stage, it has to come back to common man's philosophy. This happens to every philosopher. Such an attitude indicates that the basis for a sound philosophy is precisely daily lived experience of common people. Professional philosophy cannot ignore the deepest conviction in our everyday life. If it does, it becomes a philosophy for logical gymnastics, sometimes a beautiful palace of logical elaboration, or a fantasy of imaginative thinking which, in the final analysis, would be a lifeless system ignored by the main stream and inspiration of every-day life.

But, one might ask, is an average man a philosopher? The answer is that every man is a philosopher since every man is looking for the reasons for his actions, and this constitutes the essence of philosophy. Every man, philosopher included, has to act now and know what to do and why. This is a formulation, in simple terms, of the meaning of philosophical thinking and belief; it is at the same time its deepest formulation. The average man grasps reality intuitively and acts guided by his rational instinct. On this action the whole activity of the whole of mankind is based: individual, social, economical, religious. This average man in a simple, spontaneous manner, grasps by means of his reason the reality surrounding him and conforms his action to it.

The real value of philosophy, consequently, lies in such a grasping of reality. This grasping can be theoretically justified, further developed, put into understandable formulas, but cannot be disregarded or distorted. If a philosopher does it, his philo-

sophy becomes a philosophy of unrealistic speculation, or even a fantasy alienated from life. Such also is a philosophy which fails to embrace the broader reality and confines itself to its narrow segment. Such a philosophy cannot satisfactorily answer questions which man, by his very nature, asks all the time.

The "every day philosophy" recognizes the ultimate reality and acts accordingly. On convictions rest religions and the values which mankind as a whole, constituted by non-professional philosophers, upholds.

4. *Conclusion*

The average man instinctively or, to be more exact, by rational instinct, as Peirce would say, grasps absolute values, which ultimately reside in the existing Divinity and man's responsibility to Him. Thus, man feels compelled to act accordingly, in various circumstances of his life, in order to be happy here and hereafter.

This experience of an average man forms, naturally, the foundation for religions and justifies their existence. Philosophies, if they fail to grasp this attitude in a correct and convincing way, may turn out to be irrational forcing their convictions on the people. The influence exercised by such sources cannot be permanent, even if it lasts for some centuries, as has been the case with the persecution of various religions, more precisely of Christianity, in its first few centuries of existence. All mankind, however, and its intuitive knowledge of the existence of the absolute values persists forever, even under persecution.

Religions and philosophy as ideological branches of human knowledge uphold certain common values. In spite of the differences of opinion, we may agree that absolute value is something that which leads to the attainment of human goals. However, the multiplicity of religions seem to prevent us from knowing what absolute value is. Yet we find in the diversity of religions a certain unity which consists in the recognition of a transcendent Being and man's dependence on Him. Thus, we find an amount of support for some values if not absolute values, in religions.

This unity of approach by religions gets undermined by some philosophies. These philosophies seem to undermine any kind of

knowledge and thus lead us to ultimately question the existence of any kind of value. The way out from such a distressing position we find in the philosophy of ordinary men. They instinctively recognise certain values and support them by their conviction and action. Theoretical philosophies must be organised around the thinking and action of common man. Thus, speculative philosophy is enriched by our ordinary experience which acknowledges a transcendent Being, an Absolute Value.