THE IDEA OF GOD IN RELATION TO THEOLOGY; PP. 5-66

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CHAPTER I.

BELIEF IN GOD.

Worship of God constitutes an integral part of human life. The religious aspect of history is an index of the intellectual, moral, social, and political conditions of the race. The lowest orders of society and the most advanced live, move, and have their being, very largely controlled by the thoughts clustering around the central idea that behind or beyond the observed phenomena of nature exists the supernatural as a creating and modifying cause. The determining characteristics of the idea of God vary with different peoples according to experience, but the conception itself is so general and significant that from this standpoint as from no other one may accurately perceive the progress of the world's thought, the development of national life, the growth of moral consciousness, the motive of individual effort.

Does so universal a fact rest for its validity upon a logical demonstration? No one questions the value of logic in applying this truth to matters of conduct and thought. Indeed, the processes of reasoning are constructive in faith. But our question lies deeper: Does reasoning create belief? "Canst thou by searching find out God?"[1] This question does not imply that God is unthinkable. Nay, the idea itself may condition thought; but to say that God is the *sine qua non* of thought is certainly not to prove His absolute existence. A truth which exists for thought is conditioned by it. For the same reason a truth which is the result of thought is not absolute. The logical faculty is itself more independent than a fact which is logically proved. If by method of proof we mean the syllogism, the result of the process is limited by the nature of the premises. The very character of the truth to be proved precludes the possibility of such a thing.

The stock arguments which have been constructed in support of the truth of God's existence have been mercilessly shattered by logicians. They who have conquered by the sword of reason have perished by the same weapon. The best that has been done has made God's existence a postulate of reason. No proof, as such, has resulted in putting the fact beyond dispute.

[1] Job 11:7.

Among all these attempts to prove the existence of God the ontological argument is the most conclusive. From the days of Anselm until now this form of thought has been recognized as containing the elements of a satisfactory solution to the difficulty presented in our question. But the most complete arrangement of these elements which modern philosophical literature contains[1] is satisfactory, not as proof, but as a statement of a fact lying deeper in human consciousness than cognition, in the strict use of that term, can possibly go. To say that the very fact of self-consciousness demands a higher self in which the reflected phases of experience, the self and the not-self, are unified is, of course, to prove the necessity of the higher self in a process of complete thought; but this necessity is a logical necessity only, and hence the higher self is not real in the sense of having objective existence. In the fact that this higher self exists for reason knowledge lies the weakness of the ontological argument.

The cosmological argument is equally unsatisfactory. This is an attempt to prove from the assumed facts of finite, conditioned, and contingent existence the reality of the infinite, absolute, ontologically necessary, perfect Being. Without the assumption the argument vanishes away. Now, the nature of the assumption is that of a partial truth. The finite, the conditioned, the contingent have relative meaning only. From the point of view of the universe as a complete whole these things are unreal. We cannot say, from either the individual or the universal standpoint, that they are more than objects of thought. In contemplating the facts of finite existence the mind naturally seeks the higher sphere of the infinite which alone gives meaning to the finite as an idea. But the infinite, in this case, is only a condition of thought. Likewise the idea of a first cause may be the completion of a logical process in which the causal notion finds rest, but to suppose that this notion is identical with the perfect Being is at once to beg the question under discussion. On the basis of Aristotelian realism the argument is valid, but if Peripatetic dogmatism is not final authority in metaphysics, the argument must be abandoned.

Of a different character, but still less satisfactory, is the so-called teleological argument. It is an attempt to build up first of all the premise that there is manifested everywhere in nature and life a worthy design. This is the minor premise of the argument which concludes that there exists a single designing and creative reason as the supreme cause of the world. We need not stop to question the major premise

[1] Principal Caird, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion.*

which in all cases of this argument is assumed rather than inferred. But the second proposition is supposed to be based on actual observation. To be true, all existences must have as their end something worthy of a Creator. It is not enough to find in the world things of beauty which awaken our admiration, nor even to discover that the action of one thing upon another is according to fixed mechanical laws. We must be able to show that the individual activities of the forces of the universe produce ends worthy of a rational mind. What is the worthy end produced by the simple recurrence of events as seen in the movements of heavenly bodies? Of course, these phenomena exhibit a balance and certainty which are interesting to the mind of the observer. In the organic world there is also observed complete adjustment of parts to the whole, but what design is exhibited in flowers which are born to blush unseen, and in the countless forms of growth which in no sense adorn anything but the pages of text-books on biology? If we take careful observations in human life, the evidence of lack of worthy design is also superabundant. Ideals of good are not generally realized. People are born, live, and die without any purpose being achieved in their lives. The living and dying of thousands produce no worthy effect that human eyes can see. To human vision much of the so-called development in mankind is meaningless movement. There is just enough truth in the design idea to popularize the argument, certainly not enough to make it conclusive. We can even go so far as to say that to an absolute mind all existence may be meaningful, and that all facts give evidence of worthy ends, but this probability, since it is probability, destroys the argument, as such.

As proofs these arguments are not conclusive. But this is not equivalent to saying they perform no part in matters of belief; indeed, to a certain type of mind they are strong enough to materially affect the attitude of will which we designate faith. That is to say, from the logical standpoint they do not necessitate belief in the existence of God, while practically they serve a worthy purpose in the lives of those affected by them. This is due, however, not to the proofs, as such, but to the elements of truth which they all contain. Some genuine phases of experience are to be found in all these arguments. And if faith is ever inspired by means of these forms of statement, the credit is to be given to the facts which, to most minds at least, are as effective in the religious realm without the arguments as with them. The evidences of order and design in the world and human life are sufficient to inspire in some the feeling of reverence and the idea of a

purposing mind. The sight of the starry heavens, the majestic movement of the heavenly bodies, sense-perceptions taken up by the imagination and carried to the very limits of thought, may awaken the sense of the sublime, which to an appreciative, interpretative soul is the felt presence of God. Likewise the facts associated with the ontological argument may awaken faith in the Absolute. In self-consciousness may be found the elements of this belief. By self-consciousness we mean, not the idea of it, but that mysterious thing itself. In every conscious state the whole mind is present. What characterizes a single "field" is the focal point therein. The state of consciousness in which I occupies the centre and not-I the "margin" is not at once a clearly defined idea, but is primarily a feeling consisting of or having associated with it rudimentary intellection and impulse. Not least of the characteristics in this elementary stage of ideation concerning the self is the consciousness of dependence. The self acts and is acted upon. An original instinct is thus set free. The sense of otherness is sufficient in many cases to lead almost immediately to an act of faith in which the self recognizes that upon which it depends as good and to which it yields itself for life. This instinct for God is at the very root of self-consciousness. When taken up by the higher activities of intellection the fact of God's existence becomes self-evident.

This experience is the element of value in the ontological argument, but does not exhaust the subject of consciousness as a means of guaranteeing the truth of God's existence. All knowledge is mental experience. Scientific knowledge is mediated by the senses. That this is not all of truth individual experience loudly testifies. Ever since Kant wrote the *Critique of Pure Reason* philosophy has reckoned seriously with the problem of a knowledge as real as, if not more so than, that which is grasped and coördinated by means of the "reason" categories. There is a world of truth to which "reason" is blind. It is that phase of the conscious process in which are articulated the fears and the hopes of the human heart, the soul's appreciation of the true, the beautiful, and the good, those meaningful aspirations of mankind for a better life, and those imperative commands of duty. Are these things data for genuine knowledge? When we examine the experience of the race as reflected in history, when we interrogate ourselves as to the worthful elements of life, we are impressed with the importance which such facts have in making up the body of accepted truth. Without judgments of value civilization could not exist, and character, the greatest of all realities, would be meaningless. Out

of these experiences springs belief in God. Human life is aimless without Him. Duty is significant only as the personal, moral law is real. The world is a dark chamber of death without His presence. Our very nature necessitates His existence, and by the act of faith which accepts Him as real this which is best, truest, and eternal is realized as religion. God alone is absolute truth, complete good, eternal beauty. The will to believe is the means by which this truth is mediated, and conduct, worship, and creed express the truth in actual, practical life.

We designate these two orders of knowledge the philosophical and the religious. Each is valid in its own domain. Philosophy is concerned with the universe as construed to reason. As such it is a product of the activity of the mind in the realm of phenomena. It is a construction of knowledge independent of the demands of the feelings and will. It is a search for the fundamental principle of existence as related to knowledge. Philosophy is the work of individual minds. The demands of thought are absolutely imperative. It matters not if the Absolute is impersonal, good, bad, or indifferent. Truth, not life, is its goal.

On the other hand, the sphere of religion is that of moral values. Religion is the consciousness of God, a recognition of being in personal relationships with the author of the true, the good, and the beautiful. It is the realm of devotion, reverence, and love. It is making God a constant moral motive in one's life, the exercise of faith in the midst of difficulty, the yielding of one's self to the demands of duty. It springs from the felt need of forgiveness, the craving for certainty and fellowship, and the desire for peace. It is the life of man at its highest power.

If we thus conclude that the sphere of religion is that of faith and the sphere of philosophy that of reason, that in religion the experiences of the moral nature are coördinated and in philosophy those of the rational nature, that religion has to do with personal relationships and philosophy with the relations between ideas, that religion values truth and philosophy searches for what is true, that religion has its end in character and philosophy in knowledge — contrasted as they thus appear, these two aspects of truth are in fact interdependent and mutually conditioning. All the facts and laws of scientific knowledge, when interpreted in view of human life and destiny, reveal their innermost significance. On the other hand, the objects of faith, God and the moral law, become serviceable by means of rational comprehension.