

The Open Court

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE

Devoted to the Science of Religion, the Religion of Science, and the
Extension of the Religious Parliament Idea

Founded by EDWARD C. HEGELER

VOLUME XLI (No. 1)

JANUARY, 1927

(No. 848)

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The Open Court Publishing Company

Wieboldt Hall, 337 East Chicago Ave., CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

Per copy, 20 cents (1 shilling). Yearly, \$2.00 (in the U.P.U. 9s. 6d.)

Entered as Second-Class Matter March 26, 1887, at the Post Office at Chicago, Ill., under Act of March 3, 1879.
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Cornell Studies in Philosophy

Published Under the General Editorial Supervision
of the Professors in the Sage School of
Philosophy in Cornell University

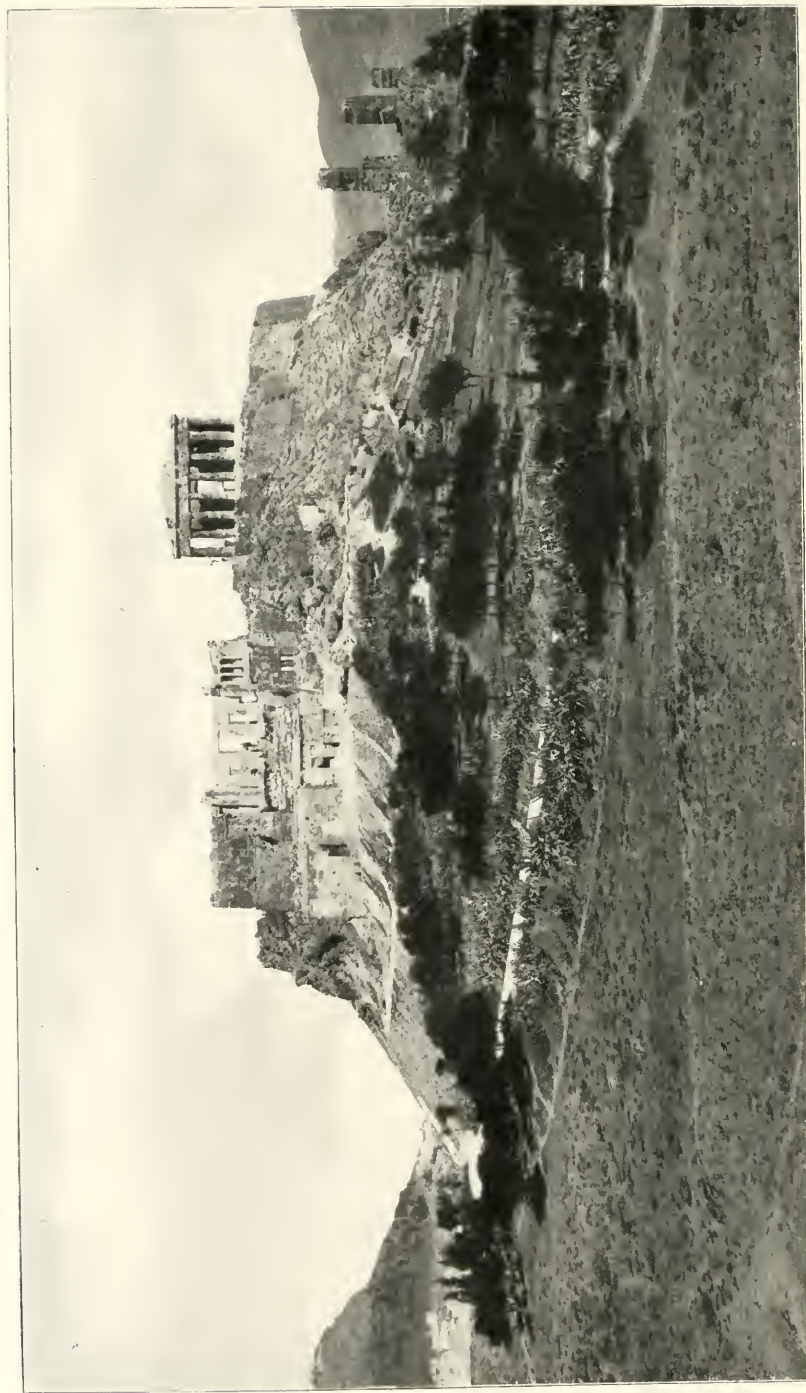
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THE ACROPOLIS.

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THE SCIENTIFIC METHOD AND RELIGION

BY WILLIAM F. CLARKE

I

IS the practice of the art of religion, as it has been understood in the past, doomed for want of a special science of its own to become fused with the practice of the other branches of the art of life? Will religion survive the ordeal of modern criticism and arise to new power and greater utility? That the group of activities which we have been accustomed to include under the name of the religious life must submit themselves to the scientific method of investigation is evident, for this method has been introduced into philosophy itself—the same philosophy whose function it is to survey the whole field of life, to reveal the various elements which constitute the field, and to organize these elements into some kind of unity—in fact, to give us wisdom.

If religious activities are a necessary element in the full life a critical philosophy cannot eliminate them; it can but clarify them, and assign to them their right and proper sphere. If they are *there*, and are ignored, they will inflict upon philosophy a gaping wound: they will be the goal against which philosophy, to its own hurt, must kick, until it sees fit to repent and take the missing element into itself.

If the "goods" of religion exist as facts of experience, and if by science we mean all that can ever enter into the knowledge of men, then there can be no conflict between true science and true religion. But all that religion claims to possess may not be there, and, too, the philosopher, even when provided with the scientific method, is not, of necessity, endowed with all knowledge. Here is ground for conflict.

Between the scientific philosopher and religion there is a conflict, and it is foolish for us to shut our eyes to the fact. Be-

tween the different branches of natural science—atomic physics, astronomy, chemistry, etc.—and religion there is no conflict; they are concerned with different activities of the human spirit. But when the scientific method is introduced into philosophy, and the philosopher, armed with a weapon which modern science has made keen and ready for his hand, claims to reveal *all* the relationships, given in experience, of the different activities of life, then, and there, the possibilities of conflict loom up before us.

What are the elements of the conflict as we can visualize them today? On the scientific, naturalistic side we have presented to us a world of "experience"—the only world we know, or can ever know. This world is all-inclusive nature, the world in which we live and move and have our being, and, too, man's inner world of thoughts, ideas, hopes and fears—the world of matter *and* of mind. Man is in nature and of nature. Individuals are particularized centers of nature's initiation and energy.

This philosophy is not without its mysteries. Every fact, every event presents an aspect which is unique and ineffable. To the fundamental mysteries of energy and the primitive "stuff" of things are added all the new qualitative existences which arise through the ever-increasing complication of relationships in organized centers of energy—awareness, memory, foresight, love, hate, etc. The question of the ultimate nature of a fact—an existence—the naturalistic philosopher may be willing to leave for ever open; it is part of the mystery of life, something to be pointed at but never known. The question for him is the question of the scientist: how does existence manifest itself, and how can man know the manifestations in such a way as to be able to make use of them in the furtherance of the interests of human life?

In this philosophy all dualism of mind *and* nature, soul *and* body, is gotten rid of—all is a development of nature. Mind, consciousness, reason, are tools—the latest and greatest tools—which nature has produced for the furtherance of its ends, its every-day ends; for nature has no final ends. God and the soul are equally banished from the field as unnecessary encumbrances, myths taken as objective existences and falsely tacked on to the scheme of things. It is, indeed, a fact that all the activities of nature do show recurrent groupings, significant characters, notable qualities, and that these characters can be pointed at, ordered and utilized in consciousness. In idealistic philosophy these same re-

current qualities, when abstracted and torn from the conditions which gave them birth, become the "eternal laws", the "universals", the "cause", the "living soul" of the very events to which they owe their own life!

All natural events—and there are none supernatural—from the dance of electrons to the conscious, willed direction of human energies, show a certain tendency. This tendency, which manifests itself in the human sphere as a desire for the satisfaction of felt needs—needs of every-increasing degrees of complexity and difficulty of satisfaction—as it is in the nature of things, may be said to be the "purpose" of nature. But this purpose must not be interpreted as originating in a will outside of nature, or of a conscious will in nature. In the place of a universal mind or soul we are presented with a natural grouping of events exhibiting a tendency to eliminate from the mixed texture of existence the accidental, irritating, destructive elements and to select, organize and perpetuate those that are recurrent, more stable, and more comforting. In man alone this purpose becomes conscious of itself and manifests itself as desire for pleasure, order, peace and joy.

Is this a revival of the ancient philosophy of pleasure? Perhaps it is. But, with the modern school, pleasure is expressly carried far enough to include the joy in the search for and the ever more full finding and expression of the highest values of human life—wisdom and knowledge, truth and beauty, harmony and peace, fellowship and love. Although there is no place here for the hope of individual immortality, still, man, freed from the tyranny of fate and all the terrors of false gods, inspired with the consciousness of the creative power of his own thought and abiding in loving fellowship with his neighbors, can find fulfilment of "desire" in the execution of the humble tasks of daily life "with all his strength, with all his heart, with all his mind". It may be hedonism; but it is not the hedonism of "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die". The new hedonism would call its followers to the feast with the bidding: Let us work and think for tomorrow, and to the end of time, we live: our work and our thoughts do follow us forever.

This, surely, is no mean philosophy. It is not proof against all criticism; but it cannot be dismissed by any shallow, fundamentalist oratory. That it is superficially attractive is suggested by the fact that the majority of the students entering our colleges

would seem to have given up Christianity, and do not think it necessary to take God into account in their plans of life. To the careless the prophets of this philosophy may seem to say: We are here today and gone tomorrow. We are our own masters, free. There is no God and no hereafter. Let us be happy whilst we can! Whereas their message is: Yes, we are free. Life is ours. The future is in the hands of men and our time is short. *Therefore* let us put our heart and mind into every passing moment, and so make events give up their meaning and minister to a rational, stable, and progressive life; for a life which is not both rational and progressive can never be stable, joyous and free.

"Let us cherish our ideals until we have converted them into intelligence. Let us throw in our lot with the universe. Though it slay us we may trust, for we are one with it. Only thought and effort can better things."

In these words of John Dewey there is an echo of the words of Jesus:

"Consider the lilies, how they grow!"

"Seek and ye shall find."

"Knock and it shall be opened unto you."

"Strive to enter in at the strait gate."

Scientists and Christians alike have only to look around them and within to see how very narrow is the gate, and how very difficult is the way that leads to wisdom—the Kingdom of Heaven.

II

Are we then any further advanced, by the scientific method, on the road to wisdom, when we arrive at a definition of "soul" as a group of natural activities "organized into unity" and are left in utter darkness as to the nature of the binding force which organizes and unifies this bundle of activities? Here it would appear that the philosopher has taken the leap which we are all tempted to take: has, by an act of inverted faith—a will to disbelieve—jumped from the solid ground of his own experience to an unjustifiable denial of possible fact which does not fit in with the position which he is anxious to maintain—a leap which no scientific philosopher should ever take.

Again, we may ask, are we any nearer the truth of things when we regard "thoughts" as histories—reconstructions of the world of things and events—which come to us laden with quali-

ties, the qualities we call memories, feelings, meanings, and upon thinking as a disposition of living activities which need no thinker?

In the assumption that because all man's highest activities arise in and from the ever-changing course of events in the world of physics therefore the spirit of man is hopelessly entangled in the meshes of the body, and that with the break-up of this organism, as we know it, all capacity for reorganization is lost and the spirit is no more, the philosopher, against all his own reasoning, lands us at final and beyond which nature cannot go. The tragedy of this hopeless situation—the final extinction of all meanings which the spirit of man has, through the ages, wrested from the stubborn field of nature—has been very forcibly expressed for us by Bertrand Russell:

“Brief and powerless is man's life, on him and on his race the slow sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow to pass through the gates of darkness, it remains only to cherish the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.”

But is the evolutionary process of necessity a circular process—out of the sun yesterday, here today, back into the sun tomorrow? Is it not rather an eternal process carrying along with it, in every step, an element of freedom?

The fact that in the comparatively recent history of the earth nature has developed centers of consciousness which are able, by taking thought of meanings and using them in art, to share in the direction of the evolutionary process should humble us and make us hesitate before we put limits to the activities of nature. If in our little selves we find consciousness, reason, self-directing power, all of which can, on rare occasions, be fused into a unity of living love, can we safely deny to infinite nature at least this much? As well might the cells which circulate in our blood and have a limited freedom of their own, were they endowed with consciousness, deny the existence of the organism in which they have their meaning and their life.

Surely one of life's greatest mysteries is the tendency of some natural events to show meanings, and at the same time of other events to develop centers “organized into unity” in such a way as to be able to interpret these meanings, and to make use of them in the furtherance of the highest aspirations of the

imagination of the human race. But we are asked to believe that these meanings are never meant; that they are just qualities of things, like the scent of a flower. Qualities are ineffable existences to be taken as they are and no more questions asked. Minds, these organized centers of nature's activities which have developed a consciousness of meanings, but the meanings must never be taken as intended signals sent up by a friendly nature to men. This would introduce the idea of God—a personality in and behind nature—an idea which must be rigorously excluded from this scheme of things. We are left with something which looks like purpose but is not willed, something which looks like friendliness but which reveals no Friend.

III

In the face of this philosophy what positive contributions can religion claim to make to the common stock of experience, and what is the position it must take up in the defence of its claim?

At the outset, it would appear that the defenders of the religious position will have to surrender much to the conclusions to which the scientific method has led us. Whatever may be the origin and destiny of man's spirit he is tied hand and foot, body and soul with the every-day happenings of nature; energy and matter arise together, and so, too, do mind and body—force without *some* matter, and spirit without *some* body are both alike inconceivable. All man's achievements are built up on a foundation of natural events. Even his highest values are values in and for life as we know it, and have been rescued by his intellect from the mixed and ever-flowing stream of things. A supernatural world utterly detached from this world is, inevitably, outside man's experience and unknown. God and the soul may both be ineffable, beyond man's powers of conception or expression, but the activities which result from the contact of God and the soul to be known, at all, must be brought within the field of common experience; and here these activities must submit to be tested and tried by the scientific method of criticism: hidden forces both in physics and in life are known by what they do—by their fruits.

One of the first results of the application of this method of the religious field is that all appeal to supernatural authority must be abandoned. Both prophets and priests have always

shown themselves to be human like the rest of men, and when they have clothed themselves, in a mechanical way, with divine authority they have committed their worst crimes: having made a God in their own image, and in their imagination confused their idol with the only God, they have carried out the dictates of their own envy, hatred and fear in the sacred Name.

The great prophets of all peoples have never taken their inspiration mechanically as their historians and followers have often done. William Blake, in an illuminating passage, tells us that he once asked the prophet Isaiah how he dared so roundly assert that God spoke to him. Isaiah answered: "I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discovered the infinite in everything, and as I was then persuaded, and remain confirmed, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for consequences, but wrote."

True prophets have always been men of genius, who, having exercised all the gifts with which they were endowed in the extraction of the meaning of events, could with the authority of wisdom—and to them the voice of wisdom was the voice of God—point to the inevitable consequence of the actions of men. That they did not look upon themselves as passive agents, mere channels for the word of God, is suggested by the description which Isaiah gives of the ideal prophet:

" . . . the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of council and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

Jesus, called by the same spirit to fulfil the office pointed to by Isaiah, at the outset of his ministry went through the experience which, in the language of poetry and drama, is symbolized for us in the account of the Temptation in the Wilderness—an experience in the deep regions of the personality which no photograph could ever have put upon the screen—the temptation to adopt a mechanical theory of his inspiration and to act contrary to the highest light of reason. With the vision of Satan and "the wild beasts" on the one side, and of God and the angels on the other, Jesus is making the decision upon which his whole life is to turn: God or Satan? He hungers with the hunger of unsatisfied desire. The temptation comes to him to satisfy this hunger in three typical ways: the way of riches, material "goods", which would limit his activities to the economic plane; the way of ecclesiastical power, which would necessitate

all sorts of compromises with the world and the flesh; and, lastly, the way of world-wide political power.

Jesus answers the Tempter in words which give us the meaning of a "Son of God".

The Tempter said unto him:

"If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread."

Jesus replies:

"It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

Then the devil taketh him into the holy city; and he set him on the pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him:

"If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down, for it is written: He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone."

"Again it is written, Thou shalt not make trial of the Lord thy God."

Again, the devil taketh him unto an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him:

"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me."

"Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written: Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."

The world kingdom towards which Jesus set his face was the kingdom pointed to by the same prophet, Isaiah, with the words: "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

In this experience we have clearly presented to us what religion demands in an inspired leader of men. He must be wise with wisdom of the gathered experiences of the past handed down to us in the treasures of literature and art—"scriptures" from which, by laborious search, we may extract the eternal life which they enshrine. He must try no experiments with God contrary to the light of wisdom—experiments which in their inception necessitate the breaking of the bonds of love and faith—expecting that God will help him. And in the object of his worship he must place the illuminating, liberating energy of love above all might and power.

Here we have all that the scientific philosopher can ask—

the ever-active search for knowledge, understanding, wisdom—with the added element of the knowledge and fear of the Lord. And “fear” is not the fear of terror, but the fear which is one with love: fear which is worship and “delight” the highest form of pleasure. Is there any basis in existence and in experience for this added element?

This brings us to the center of the religious position. Behind the face of ever-changing nature is God: God, the source of all power, the creator of all beauty, the truth of all stable relationship, the life which flows through all things: God in whom the highest attribute of man—love—finds its eternal fulfilment in fellowship with the source from which it flows: The meaning of all meanings is joyous activity, not the dead end of all that life means to us.

Jesus proclaimed himself to be the Way to be trodden to the Father, the Bread of Life to be eaten and inwardly digested, the Word to be heard and understood, the Light to be used and not hid. He did not offer himself as a meaningless portent to be gazed at in passive contemplation: one whose Name could be used as a magical formula by men in the furtherance of their own ends.

The God which religion thus presents to us is not the God of pantheism, in which all personality loses its meaning, and the soul of man is extinguished, sunk in the soulless mechanism of nature. This God is the eternal person in whom are gathered up all the mysterious elements which go to make up nature's meanings and man's personality—the God in whom wisdom and power are one with love. In loving God, and in being the object of his love, the soul of man finds immortality.

Can man experience such a God? Many of the great personalities of history, whose works and words are active forces in the lives of men today, have told us that in such experience they found their joy, their inspiration, and their strength. Can he who has had such experience so express his experience as to be a light and guide to his fellow-men? Yes, even that has been done. It is not easy, for the language of the deep regions of the soul—of heaven—is the language of poetry and symbol, of highest art, and so to the pure scientist, foolishness; to the fundamental literalist, a stumblingblock; but to one who “knows himself in religion,” the wisdom of God.

Those who have found God in their lives tell us, that in

any fruitful seeking of the meaning of all meanings, we must be prepared to detach ourselves from every fleeting thing, every realized, temporary end. We must watch the pointing of events, take their message, and ever press on our way, until, denying ourselves and ceasing to cling to any one of the multitude of things borne on the surface of the stream of life, we find ourselves conscious of the deep current which bears all things on its breast. Here, in the bosom of the Father, we find all "things" of nature given back to us set in their true setting, clothed with beauty, and radiant with eternal meaning; and here, too, in this consciousness we find unutterable joy.

The saints of all ages and of all races tell us they have found God—the Abyss of Darkness which no illuminated thing within the compass of the mind of man can image forth—God to whom the fire of love alone can guide us; and that in Him they have found the light of all their seeing:

"Into the happy night
In secret, seen of none,
Nor saw I ought,
Without or other light or guide,
Save that which in my heart did burn.

This fire it was that guided me
More certainly than midday sun,
Where he did wait,
He that I knew imprinted on my heart,
In place where none appeared."¹

"O lamps of fire that shined
With so intense a light,
That those deep caverns where the senses live,
Which were obscure and blind,
Now with strange glories bright,
Both heat and light to his beloved give."²

Such has been the experience of the truly great saints, and in their lives and in their deaths they have shown forth the fruits of their experience.

¹ *San Juan de la Cruz: Noche Oscura del Alma*: translation by Gabriela Cunningham Graham.

² *San Juan de la Cruz: Llama de Amor Viva*: translation by Arthur Symonds.