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A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

The Evangelical Quarterly

OCTOBER 15TH, 1949

THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY OF THE BIBLE

WHENEVER we approach a subject of this nature we are confronted with the problem of documentary sources. We are advised that it is unscientific to regard the Old Testament as one whole. We must expect a development in philosophic as in other regions of human thought. No doubt there is a good deal of truth in this position. But it can be carried too far. There are two features that must be kept distinct : (1) the influence of contemporary thought on a writer's outlook ; (2) the actual outlook of the writer.

A man, e.g., may embody, consciously or unconsciously, elements from John Calvin in his theology. Most men to-day embody them unconsciously. But a man's main theological outlook can be definitely determined whether it is known that he is indebted to Calvin or not. A paedo-Baptist is none the less a paedo-Baptist because he is blissfully ignorant that his attempt to meet the argument from silence as to children being baptised by the counter argument that there is no example of women taking Holy Communion is found in Calvin's *Institutes*. Where new elements emerge they will be apparent in the formulation of the Old Testament narrator or prophet. What we have to avoid is the assumption of a philosophic development with which the Old Testament writings, or some of them, can only be reconciled by a violent distortion of their plain natural meaning.

It is not scientific to say off-hand that Moses knew nothing of certain philosophic or ethical principles and therefore could not have written or dictated certain passages attributed to him. It may be so, but we really need *a posteriori* evidence in the form of indisputable historic data. These are not easy to get. It is much easier to say Moses could not have known this or that than to establish that as a matter of fact Moses did not know it.

Still the habit persists of assuming hastily that we are in possession of such evidence of a consistent philosophic development that we are enabled to determine the approximate time of the advent of what has been called " Ethical Monotheism ".

The phrase conceals a number of ambiguities but it is still widely used. Does it mean that there was a primitive monotheism which was not ethical? Or does it mean that Animism, Polytheism, Henotheism were all unethical ? And how does it propose to relate *Ēthos* to Ethics, seeing that there was some kind of *ēthos* even in the most primitive periods of human history ? We are reminded of Butler's plaint, " and so men go on with words ". We might even add, " and lose their temper when they are stopped ". But we do not seek to pursue the matter further, at this stage, than to point out that increasing light has been thrown on the early stages of Israel's history.

It is no longer possible to regard the times even of the patriarchs as truly primitive. It is foolish to speak of the Israelitish wanderers in the desert as " nomads " in the same connotation as illiterate Bedouins. Canaan was influenced by Babylonian and Hurrian civilisation, a civilisation sufficiently advanced to admit of the framing of elaborate written codes of law which found expression in the recognised habits of the people.

To suggest that such a civilisation could emerge without ethics is to belie the evidence of history. The question to-day appears to be not " Could Moses excogitate an elaborate code ? " but " How much of the alleged Mosaic code can be said to be really original ? " Hammurabi, the Hittites, the Hurrians and the Ras Shamra tablets demand a very serious revision of the older theories concerning the exact type of civilisation prevalent in Canaan and in the surrounding peoples at the time of the patriarchs and also at the time of the Exodus.

Still there are some who cling with pathetic earnestness to the modern but now traditional stratification of the Old Testament deposits. For our purpose it is not necessary to disturb this fairly modern yet widely accepted division into JE, P and D. Even, indeed, the old fragmentary hypothesis, were it accepted, would still leave us with certain very remarkable pronouncements which may properly be described as embodying the philosophy underlying Biblical monotheism. For example, Dr. Driver draws attention to the anthropomorphic language

in which what is called the older Creation narrative is couched. The Lord God *formed* man, *builded* woman out of his side, *breathed* into man's nostrils, *planted* a garden, *made* trees to grow, *formed* every beast. We have to ask, What does this characteristic phraseology imply ?

If we are to use modern language we would say that the writer had a very decided conception of the teleological argument as it has been developed by later philosophers. The graphic details leave nothing to be desired. The Lord God formed, builded, breathed, planted, made. However anthropomorphic the form of expression, indeed just because it is so definitely anthropomorphic, no doubt whatever is left on the mind of the reader that here there is a deep conviction that the existing world was designed. And we are carried further back than the furniture of the Universe. The Lord God made the earth and the heavens. Later He caused rain to fall upon the earth. Its barren condition is explained by the fact that hitherto He had withheld His hand. There are no secondary causes introduced, unless indeed by a rather violent exegesis we are to assume that alone amongst created things the mist that watered the earth lay outside the Divine purpose. I have not come across any interpretation of this nature and it seems as if we are justified in disregarding it.

Later systems of philosophy have welded into a whole the varying strands of Greek and Roman thought in relation to this direct Hebrew conception. But it is surely significant that at the dawn of Hebrew thought we are introduced to the idea of direct Divine agency as the truest explanation alike of the origin and development of the ordered Universe.

Kant, indeed, has been able to criticise the later teleological argument on the ground that it provides an Artificer rather than a Creator. This early narrative frees itself from this charge because it gives us two stages: (1) God made the heaven and the earth, and (2) then in the second aspect of the Divine work provided for the rich variety of nature as it exhibits itself in the earth which we know.

It is indeed doubtful if any reflecting human being could picture the existing Universe without in some way having recourse to the idea of design. But it is worthy of note that there is a striking contrast between the account in Genesis and the Babylonian account as we have discovered it in the Creation

tablets. The struggle of the gods is absent. The vague suggestion that somehow the collision between rival deities called the world into being gives place to a direct declaration that God made the heavens and the earth.

Even the profound Greek concept of Being and Becoming which has exercised such a powerful influence on contemporary philosophic thought in our day is here replaced by the Divine fiat. As the Psalmist expressly puts it, " He spake and it was done ; He commanded and it stood fast" (xxxiii. 9). Twice over in the Psalms we have the idea, evidently embedded in the Hebrew mind, that the bare word of the Lord was in itself sufficient to call the ordered host of heaven and earth into being. And closely connected with this effortless calling into existence by a word is the notion of a Divine decree stabilising and ordering the processes of the Universe (cxlviii. 6). There is here a doctrine of lofty transcendence. The God who calls stands above and outside the world of His Creation. Centuries of human reflection passed and yet man failed to attain to this idea. Indeed we may add that reflective minds failed so completely that they reviled the concept which they could not adequately appreciate. Modern immanentist philosophy and theology revolted against the formulation which gave us a God outside His world. It assumed, on very insufficient grounds, that a God above must also be a God apart and could find no place for the Old Testament presentation except that which developed into a barren Deism. It presented us with an *Either–Or*. *Either* God is immanent and we are left to the slow process of His inner urging to attain to truth and holiness ; *or* God is transcendent and we lose ourselves in the uncharted wilderness of the unknown and the inscrutable. The immanentist philosophy has not quite fulfilled its promise and we are witnessing to-day a revolt against it. But our immediate purpose is to show that Biblical monotheism frees itself from the *Either–Or* with which it has been confronted. There is already a hint of this in the remarkable scene in which God brings all the beasts of the field to Adam to see what he would call them. " Whatsoever Adam called every living creature that was the name thereof " (Gen. ii. 20). In order to get the significance of this message as it registered in the minds of the enlightened in Israel we must keep before us the insistence on the creative impulse associated with calling. One passage, out of many that might be cited, will help

to make this clear. In the prophecies of Isaiah we have the words: "Lift up your eyes on high and behold who hath created all those things, that bringeth out their host by number : He calleth them all by name, by the greatness of His might, in that He is strong in power ; not one faileth" (Isa. xl. 26). I am indebted to Dr. C. H. H. Wright for pointing out to me the striking parallel between Isaiah and Genesis. The Psalmist gives voice to the same sentiment : "He telleth the number of the stars ; He calleth them all by their names" (cxlvii. 4). Here we are given the link which goes far to explain the width and wisdom of the Hebrew concept.

The Deist believed, of course, that we had the capacity to read in some measure the revelation of God as it was displayed in the order of nature. But he did not enter fully into the foundation reasons for this capacity. His failure led to the later Agnosticism which professed to follow Hume but did not follow him to the bitter logical conclusion that science was as helpless as theology before the hidden powers of the non-phenomenal.

The Old Testament rises higher than arid Deism. Without surrendering the important truth of God's transcendence it offers a reasonable explanation of man's competence to search into the mysteries of nature. There is a true calling of the beasts of the field. It is both limited and real. It is limited because God brings them to Adam. Man can deal only with the existent. He cannot create. It is real because God endows man with a peculiar penetration that enables him to understand and interpret the secrets of being.

It is a simple figure, but Hebrew thought working upon it produced a far-reaching explanation of the relation of man to the world and to God. Nor are we left in doubt that here we have a real kinship with the Eternal. Special care is taken to differentiate between the creation of man and the creation of the other orders of earthly beings. Every beast of the field and every fowl of the air are formed out of the ground. Man too, like them, is formed out of the ground, but there is a special act of God depicted by which He "breathed" into man's nostrils the breath of life. Later reflection does not exaggerate this difference. The flood narrative, at least on one interpretation, speaks impartially of "all in whose nostrils was the breath of life" (Gen. vii. 15), and the Preacher asks : "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward and the spirit of the beast that goeth

downward to the earth ? " (Eccles. iii. 21). Nor can we find any justification for a sharp distinction between " soul " or " breath " and " spirit " or " wind ". We may say with truth that usually the term " spirit " is used to describe the higher life of intelligence, while " soul " covers as well every animated existence. But these are ambiguous phrases, to say the least, that warn us against making hard and fast decisions which rest on the bare use of the different words.

The underlying suggestion seems rather to be that all animated being comes from God and the difference must be found in the functions attributed to animated being. So the young Elihu warns Job that " There is a spirit in man : and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding " (Job xxxii. 8). We are justified in saying that the unique feature in the creation of man is the measure of understanding with which he has been endowed. Thus then, the remarkable picture of man naming the creatures is the comment upon the words " God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life ". Man has the strange capacity of penetrating to some extent into the secrets of being. It is this capacity that distinguishes his spirit from any other spirit in animated creation on this mundane sphere.

If we must find a word that is applied solely to this capacity, we cannot do better than trace the usage of the word " wisdom " both in the Old and New Testament. God has built the world by His wisdom and He giveth wisdom to the sons of men. That the wisdom thus given has its limitations does not destroy the fact that it is a gift of God bestowed on men and angels but denied to other creatures. The so-called later narrative of creation gives yet a different slant upon this truth : " God made man in His image ; in the image of God created He him " (Gen. i. 27). Here also there is a link with the story we have been considering. Man is stated to have been given " *dominion* " over the other creatures. This has an important relation to the other narrative where we are told man calls beasts and fowls by their name. Further, this later message concerning dominion is explicative of the sense in which the term " image " is employed. Man is like God in the exercise of rule and he rules in nature because he understands its character and discovers its laws. The hiatus is bridged. The transcendent God is not an absent Deity, seeing He has given to man a knowledge of His

ways. And this knowledge is part of man's nature. We are more indebted to the Bible for an advance in knowledge than we realise. The revelation of one God who made all things gives us the unity of nature which forms the basis of all research. The unity of man with God, through the impartation to him of the Divine gift of wisdom, constitutes the assurance that we are not following idle fancies when we insist on the fact that there is in the world an intelligent order similar to that which operates in our own soul.

Paul is sometimes dealt with rather harshly because of his alleged Rabbinism. But at least he has grasped the inner philosophy of creation when he writes : " For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse " (Rom. i. 20). In the marvellous colloquy that God has with Job (xxxviii) the two ideas are combined of understanding and the limitations of understanding. It is laid down that man can perceive. At the same time it is equally clearly laid down that his perception ought to lead him, not only to knowledge but to the point where knowledge itself demands a more adequate explanation than the mere relation of fact to fact. Job is constrained to say : " I know that Thou canst do everything and that no thought can be withholden from Thee " (xlii. 2).

Much has been made of the cosmological argument. Here we find its nerve. Our wisdom, given us by God, leads us to recognize at least that the world is a dependent world resting finally on the omnipotence of God. From this phase there rises the Old Testament doctrine of Providence. It is because the patriarchs believed that God understood the inner process of rain and sun in a way incomprehensible to our finite intelligence that they were prepared to seek the face of God in prayer and to acknowledge that it was owing to His providential care that the seasons ministered to our need, that the winds blew and the rains fell. And not only did the seed sprout but even the creatures of the wild acted according to God's governance. There is combined in this amazing philosophy a reverent agnosticism with a buoyant confidence. What man does not know God knows, and what man cannot do, God does for him. It is small wonder that the loftiness of vision led men to conjecture that the achievement of such a conception belonged to a late period of reflection. But any such idea is tempered by the sad fact that some of its most

potent features wait for acceptance still at the hands of many of those who are deemed foremost amongst the world's reflective geniuses. Many still cling proudly to the notion of Order without an Orderer and even of purpose without a Planner. While we are forced by our very constitution to interpret everything in terms of personality, many shrink from drawing the conclusion, so strongly asserted in the Bible, that a world interpreted by personal categories must have its origin in a Personal Being. The Bible does not hesitate to posit a Personal God as the true origin of all we see and know. That is the truest expression of the cosmological argument. It is the only one that gives dependence its true meaning.

Is there any trace of the Scholastic ontological argument? Most probably the first reaction in reply to this question would be to answer with a direct negative. It is a commonplace amongst commentators to say that the Bible always assumes, and never attempts to prove, the existence of God. There is much to be said for this contention. But it may possibly be that it conceals an error. Certainly, as it is pressed in some quarters to imply that the Bible has no argument for the being of God, it degenerates into error.

It may be admitted at once that in the precise form given to it by Anselm the ontological argument finds no place in the Scriptures. But then neither do the teleological or the cosmological in the forms familiar in Aquinas. That only means that systematic phraseology in the form of the syllogism is not the mould in which Biblical revelation has been cast. But if the nerve of the teleological and of the cosmological argument are found in the Bible, the way is open to inquire if we may not assert something similar concerning the ontological argument. We believe that the nerve of the ontological argument is found in the repeated assertions that God's understanding is infinite, that there is no searching of it, that His thoughts are higher than ours. The statements are spread so prolifically over the whole record that further elaboration seems unnecessary.

We can turn then to the view noticed above, in which there resides a great truth, that the existence of God is always assumed and never argued in Sacred Writ. When we seek to discover the reason for this it appears in the passages to which attention has been drawn. There is assuredly conviction of a Transcendent Genius who operates far beyond the scope of our understanding, yet operates, entirely, along the lines demanded by the experiences

of our mental life. God wills, God plans, God deals, God exhorts, God consults, yet all in a sphere of supreme competence that makes the wisdom of man, though something of the same order, appear foolishness. When we join to these conceptions the reassuring thought of a revealing God who enters into close relation with His creature man, it becomes next to impossible to avoid holding that under the assertions concerning God's Being there lies the confident assurance that such a Being, because of His very nature, must exist. The modern revolt against the ontological argument has its roots in the failure to see that demonstration demands a final premiss which is strictly indemonstrable. The modern scientist is like a man using a tool without ever inquiring how there came to be a tool to use. The Bible at least is free from this particular inconsequence. It deduces the Being of God from the revelation of His activities. Yet it recognises that, on the last analysis, such a deduction must have at its heart the assumption that the revelation of a most perfect Being assuredly carries with it the necessity of His existence. It may be that to some of my readers this last equation of the popular arguments with the voice of Scripture may seem, to put it mildly, somewhat finely drawn. But even so it may be sufficient to enable us to realise that philosophic reflection owes more to the Bible than many of its advocates are prepared to concede. Its monotheism gave point to the idea of a single universe, and, we venture to add, gave precision to the various developments of philosophic thought resulting from this unitary concept.

But there still remains a wide and most important field of philosophy. We have not yet touched the important region in which thought becomes directly ethical. It can be argued with cogency that a world of purpose and a world of ideas must, from its very nature, be ethical. So much has already been implied in the rejection of the suggestion that it is possible to conceive of any monotheism which is wholly non-ethical. But we have still to inquire if there is a precise content given to these ethical implications in the Word of God. This becomes all the more important in view of the prevailing modern idea that the codes by which we regulate our conduct are capable not only of expansion, which all must admit, but also of radical alterations in view of changing conditions in Society. There has been an upsurge of pragmatism, by which we mean a working code of morals

which derives only from the conditions of life. This fact makes a discussion of the relation of morals to the being of God a matter of great consequence. Is there a moral order in the Universe reflecting the moral character of its Maker, just as there is an order of design and a law of dependence ? There are many who would deny this. Our immediate business is not to discuss the relevancy of the answer which may be given to the facts of life but to set out the Bible contribution. Here as elsewhere it is important to distinguish two questions : (1) What does the Bible say ? (2) What are the grounds on which we hold the Bible message for truth ? It may be difficult to keep these two questions rigidly apart but in our collection of data we ought to be influenced as little as possible by the second question. The danger of making the Bible say what we think it ought to say will be thereby minimised. The narrative in Genesis presents us with man in a triple relation. He has a responsibility to God, to his fellow creatures and to the whole world animate and inanimate. The distinction between man and what we call the lower creation is very clearly indicated. There was not an help found meet for man. In that very fact lies the promise of a new moral order. Man is unique. Already attention has been directed to the reference in the other creation narrative—placed, whether warrantably or not, at a later date—in which man is given dominion. These intimations suggest what is developed throughout the whole Bible story, that the faculty of ordering, classifying and to some extent determining world phenomena provides the beginning of morality. It is impossible to place man above the material order without giving him also a higher purpose, a fuller destiny. So we have the contrast between man and the beasts of the field. We have the Psalmist's plaint, " So foolish was I and ignorant, even as a beast before Thee " (lxxiii. 22). This very contrast, with its assertion of superiority, forthwith involves responsibility. " The merciful man is merciful to his beast." " Thou shalt not muzzle the ox when he treadeth out the corn " (Deut. xxv. 4). Care for animals is not based solely on utilitarian motives. It is worthy of note that in Jewish and Christian circles there has been found a deepening sense of responsibility to the creatures God has placed under our control. But this dawning of moral sense finds fuller expression in the relation of man to his fellow man. The beginning of human moral order is found in family relations. The Old Testament

gives us a graphic description all the more profound because it is so engagingly simple : " This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh " (Gen. ii. 23).

The new relation out of which all social provisions and obligations arise could not be better expressed. We read and talk of " solidarity of the race ". Here it is given to us in a sentence. At Sinai the Ten Words (credited to Moses in at least a proverbial form even by critics who take considerable liberties with the accepted text, e.g. Dr. Charles) repeat the idea, drawing from it a moral consequence : " Honour thy father and thy mother." The right to command and the duty to obey spring from this natural relation. Man is no longer a solitary unit but a being with added responsibilities that involve directly the awakened moral sense. Thus the being who is capable of reflection finds himself impelled by an inner urge of duty. Once the conviction is born its development is rapid. In the early days we find a conception of absolute dominion that rather startles us : " Slay my two sons if I bring him not to thee " (Gen. xlii. 37). A few moments of reflection helps to mitigate our amazement. It is the principle of hostages to fortune that is enunciated. But behind it lies the idea of solidarity and the seemliness by which those who are near of kin share in the good or bad fortune of their intimates. Thus the idea of the neighbour is born which found such definite expression at the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. " He who showed pity " was a true neighbour to the afflicted and that is our criterion. Blood kinship in the narrower sense widens into a true world brotherhood which has not yet reached complete realisation. St. Paul gives the practical application of this great ideal: " Love worketh no ill to his neighbour : therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law " (Rom. xiii. 10). Students of ethical theory will remember how this aspect has received extensive treatment at the hands of T. H. Green.

But the Bible does not stop there. There is a higher and more comprehensive moral relation. The very works of man's hands are a trust given him by his Maker. All the various avenues of activity as well as social relations provide a meeting point in God. George MacDonald once said that if the Westminster Divines had only stopped after the first answer in the Shorter Catechism they would have rendered a great benefit to all : " Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him for ever." But we are all a bit like the pedigree hunter who seeks

to stop before he comes to the hangman's rope. The unity of all moral duty in the postulate of a Supreme Governor of the world and man is indeed a lofty conception, but in the Bible presentation it carries with it the dire possibility of failure and consequent ultimate answerability to violated law. Man is under command. " Thou shalt not " is an imperative which he neglects at his peril. Even so gifted a writer as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch speaks of " the vindictive God " of the Old Testament. It is Quiller-Couch also who laments the elimination of the double negative " I ain't done nothing to no one " from our speech. So we may perhaps reply to his implied censure in Dickens' famous phrase " There ain't no sich a person as Mrs. 'Arris ". For if we have a Commander we must also have a Vindicator of His commands. A God who idly threatens would be no God. " Vindictive " has two meanings. It may mean " one who punishes " and in that sense it is a necessary corollary to one who commands. Or it may mean " one who cherishes spleen " and in that sense it cannot apply to the perfect Being. Nor can it be fitted to the God of the Old Testament Who is " gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and abundant in goodness and truth " (Ex. xxxiv. 6). The fact is that we cannot have it both ways. Either retribution is always unworthy, in which case an elaborate protective system " for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of them that do well " has no validity ; or retribution where there is wrong-doing is commendable and so is traceable back to God. The God of the Old Testament takes the latter view, which seems inevitable if we are to maintain a true system of government. The great problem of evil meets us here as it does at every turn of our mundane existence. The Bible contribution to the solution of their great problem is to relate it to a definite refusal to accept the final dictates of God in ordering our lives. Such an attitude must introduce an element of disorder and must invite judgment. The inevitable consequence can only be obviated by a direct operation of God Himself. Grace is the counterpart of judgment, but grace and judgment alike involve the concept of a direct relation of God to man, and all that this implies is a consistent moral order and a true responsibility for our conduct.

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