

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

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

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

hath not flesh and bones as ye behold Me having," and had it in his mind when he wrote (1 Cor. xv. 50): "This I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." Luke's is indeed the Pauline Gospel, yet his acceptance of a tradition so alien from Paul's fundamental conception of the Person of Christ evinces his independence. He was no mere echo of his master and friend.

DAVID SMITH.

THE VALUE-JUDGEMENTS OF RELIGION.

II.

CRITICAL AND CONSTRUCTIVE (*continued*).

II. *The Relation of Religious Knowledge to Science and Philosophy.*

(1) HAVING discussed the theory of value-judgements, as presented by Ritschl, Herrmann, and Kaftan, as developed more fully by Otto Ritschl, Reischle, and Scheibe, as criticized by Denney, Orr, and Wenley, and having indicated wherein the theory seems still defective, I may now venture to deal briefly with the problem to the solution of which this theory is a contribution. What is the relation of religious knowledge to science and philosophy? That this question is being asked at all is a proof that there is a rift in our intellectual lute which makes the music of a harmonious view of God, man, and the world mute. That there is a discord felt in human thought on the highest themes, and that an escape from it is desired by our finest minds is proved by such lines as Tennyson's:

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,
 But more of reverence in us dwell;
 That mind and soul, according well,
 May make one music as before."

Let us then consider how this discord has arisen, and how the harmony can once more be gained. God, self and the world, these are the last terms of man's knowledge, and the attempt may be made to look at the sum of being from each as a standpoint. If the world is the starting-point, then we have science; if self, philosophy; if God, theology, which is sifted and ordered religious knowledge. Science deals with objects in space and events in time, and seeks to find out their natures and causes. In philosophy man asks, what relation has the world to himself, for what reason it is as it is, what purpose it serves. In theology man presses above and beyond world and self to find the ground for their relation to one another in a larger and higher unity, which can embrace and explain both, God. But man is not left merely to infer this unity-in-difference from self and world, but by the very constitution of his manhood has an intuition of that unity, the witness of God to Himself, the light of all man's seeing; and the history of religion is the development of this intuition of God, which, as God is active and man responsive in the development, is also the progress of revelation, until an idea of God is reached which is recognized gradually as adequate for the explanation of the Universe. Theology is the statement of all that is given in this idea of God, not as it might be speculatively inferred from the relation of the world and self, but as it has been practically attained in the course of man's religious experience. Accordingly science, philosophy, and theology are different modes in which human intelligence is exercised. Science deals with the world as an object of knowledge, and by observation, experiment, inference and hypothesis seeks to explain what it is, and how it has come to be what it is. It assumes that the object is known, but neglects the relation of the object known to the subject knowing. Here philosophy comes in, and

asks what knowledge is, and what guarantee we have of the truth of our knowledge, the correspondence of thought and reality. But man finds in himself not only this ideal of truth, but also other ideals; and he cannot but ask if these have any universal validity, if they cast any light on the ultimate cause, the essential nature, and the final purpose of the world. In pursuing this inquiry philosophy is led to recognize the idea of God, the absolute reality which explains the existence in this unity-in-difference of world and self. It is not with this speculative idea of God with which theology is primarily concerned. For theology religion is not, as it has been too often for philosophy, only one element in man's life, but it is the element of supreme importance. In religion God is no inferred idea, but an experienced reality, and to religion theology attaches itself. Each of these methods of using the intellect develops its own type of mind. Exclusive attention to one aspect of reality generally involves an incapacity to appreciate the significance, and estimate the value of other aspects. The man of science, with his solid results in the explanation of nature's laws, and the adaptation of its forces to minister to human comfort, is prone to despise the abstract speculations of the philosopher; and the philosopher, with his confidence in the capacity of reason, if not to solve all mysteries, at least to set bounds beyond which human knowledge must not dare to go, is incredulous of the claim of theology, that in religion man knows more of God than reason can discover. The theologian too may be so absorbed in the one idea of God, as to neglect the minute and accurate study of nature and history which would alone qualify him to pronounce judgement on the statements of science or the conclusions of philosophy. While there are some well proportioned minds, which assign to each mental function its proper place, yet it is to be feared that the modern tendency is to ever greater

specialization, and consequently to a wider separation of interests, and a deeper misunderstanding among those who are pursuing divergent paths of thought. It may be useful, therefore, to consider how the relation of these three modes of knowledge has been conceived at various times within that course of human development of which our complex European culture is the result.

(2) In Hebrew history religion was so dominant a factor that science and philosophy gained no independent development. In Greece religion exercised less influence over human thought. At first science and philosophy were not separated by difference of purpose, or variety of method. The attempt to explain the world as a whole, the task of philosophy, came before the attempt to explain its parts, the work of science. While attempts were made to find some rational explanation of the popular mythology, the problem of the relation of science and philosophy on the one hand, and of theology on the other, was never raised. In Philo's writings we have an interesting attempt to combine the religious history of the Hebrews and the philosophical speculations of the Greeks, and in Neo-Platonism a pathetic effort to save Paganism by giving to its myths a speculative interpretation. In the Christian Church the logical methods and the metaphysical categories of Greek philosophy were in course of time adopted in the formulation of its theology; and while the alliance was undoubtedly useful in securing the acceptance of Christian ideas, yet these ideas had to undergo modification as a result of it. During the Middle Ages the mind of man was bound in the fetters of ecclesiastical dogma, and all thought which was not submissive to the faith of the Church was suspected and condemned. The Reformation was not simply a religious revival, it was also an intellectual emancipation, and science in the works of Bacon, and philosophy in the writings of Descartes, first entered on a

development independent of theology. It is only when the distinctness and the independence of the three modes of knowledge are recognized that the problem of their relation to one another becomes important. Theology by prescriptive right for a time continued to claim the primacy, although it could not keep science and philosophy in absolute dependence. Kant exposed the defects of the theology of his age, and tried to subordinate theology to philosophy in his *Religion within the Bounds of Pure Reason*, in which the Christian truths and facts are explained as somewhat imperfect attempts to express what is much better said in the critical philosophy. Here a mutilated theology was forced into the scanty garments of an ethical theory. Hegel declares the religious consciousness inferior to the speculative, and that the images of religion need to be translated into the ideas of philosophy. A school of theologians in Germany has sought to show Hegelianism as latent in Christianity, and Christ as the discoverer of an idea of which Hegel has made the full and proper use. Modern science, not in its workers in any field of inquiry, but in its thinkers who have tried to survey all its territory, Comte and Spencer, has denied theology any claim to be called knowledge, and has reduced philosophy to be a humble dependent on science. In contemporary thought, therefore, both science and philosophy have attempted to subordinate or supersede theology. To such treatment theology cannot submit, for it is the guardian of religion, and religion is a constant and essential element of human experience, a permanent and potent factor of human history. The more thorough the investigations of psychology, and the more extensive the inquiries of history, the clearer the proof that man is religious, and that for every man who has owned its claim and felt its power religion is the supreme element in his

experience. Theology, as giving intellectual expression to man's religious knowledge, cannot submit to any indignity from any other form of man's mental activity. Science as a reasonable account of man's sense-experience cannot claim any greater certainty than, or superior value to, theology as the interpretation of religion for thought. Philosophy cannot claim to have given an adequate solution of the problem which intelligible existence presents, when it overlooks or belittles that element in human nature, that factor in human history, which by its essential character proclaims itself the supremely significant, the relation of man to that absolute existence on which all finite existences depend. If religion be what it claims so be, theology can never consent to take the lowly place and play the humble part which science and philosophy have recently attempted to assign to it.

(3) The Ritschlian theology, with its theory of value-judgements, attempts to deal with this problem, how theology may assert its position and fulfil its function in spite of this opposition of science and philosophy and in independence of them. There can be no doubt that it recognizes fully the claim of religion to yield a conception of the nature and purpose, and a certainty of the existence of God which neither philosophy nor science can give or take away. Instead of admitting that this knowledge is in any way inferior to that of science or philosophy, it asserts the incompetence of both to give any final answer to the questions which are answered by religion. Both may attempt to solve the ultimate problems of existence, but then they abandon the safe and sure methods, which are the boast of science, but which will not carry philosophy far in its more ambitious effort; they are yielding to a religious impulse, are invading the province which is distinctively the property of religion, and then come into

onflict with it. While, as has already been shown, Ritschl seems to recognize the legitimacy of this invasion, and thus the probability of this conflict, yet the view of the most of his followers is, that, if religion on the one hand, and science with philosophy on the other, confine themselves to their own provinces, there need be no conflict whatever. Such a question cannot be conclusively argued in the abstract, but must be dealt with in the concrete. A few illustrations will do more to clear up the position than arguments for or against the views of Ritschl or his followers. *First*, let it be frankly conceded that as regards the facts, causes, laws of nature, science has the exclusive right to pronounce judgement. The theology which contradicts geology or anthropology on the physical origin and development of nature and man needlessly exposes itself to attack. When science insists on applying the same categories to life and mind in man as to inanimate and irrational nature, then philosophy may step in, and bid science confine itself within its own frontiers, unless it is prepared in annexing new territory to augment its categories, and revise its methods. Physical categories cannot be applied to explain mental, moral, social, religious phenomena; the methods of the laboratory do not disclose the secrets of the soul of man. Whether we can have a science of mind, society, history, religion, is too large a question to be discussed here, but it is relevant to our present purpose to insist that philosophy as a criticism of categories in the widest sense, as determining their order and estimating their worth, has an important function to fulfil in defining the limits within which certain categories are applicable. This is certain that the methods of observation, experiment, inference, and hypothesis, as practised by science, are inadequate to deal with the last questions thought can ask itself, the ultimate cause, the

essential nature, the final purpose of the Universe. These methods even are inadequate to explain and interpret the highest elements in experience, and the mightiest factors in history, man's freedom, reason, conscience, worship. Philosophy must take up the questions left by science, and must strive, by duly recognizing the significance of the ideals which man seeks to realize for the interpretation of the reality, which conditions all his endeavours, to conceive the world as a unity, and its cause, nature, and purpose in such a way as not only to meet man's questions, but even in its answers to do justice to the demands of conscience and the soul's needs. A philosophy may fail to assign its full importance to religion and the testimony which it bears as regards the highest reality, and its conclusions may, therefore, come into conflict with religious knowledge. The criticism which is relevant then is not that philosophy may not deal with these questions, but that this philosophy has not taken into account the full reality to be interpreted. One cannot but feel that even German idealism, which seems to me on the whole the type of philosophy which has the closest affinity with the Christian religion, fails because it does not give to the fact of Christ the decisive authority in the solution of the problems of thought, life and duty, which Christian faith accords to Him. Christian theology can meet philosophy here on its own ground, and show that in neglecting this fact, what Christ is for faith, it has omitted the most valuable part of the reality which it undertakes to interpret. Although every philosophy is incomplete which does not do full justice to the knowledge which religion possesses, yet we ought not, as the Ritschlian school seems to do, to deny that, apart from man's practical necessities, there is an intellectual demand for an intelligible unity of all knowledge, which philosophy seeks quite legitimately to

meet. The world-view of the man who recognizes the intellectual significance of the Christian faith, and seeks in his philosophy to do justice to it, will, however, fall short of the world-view of him who knows its practical value. Intellectual appreciation cannot accomplish what personal experience can. The man who has found his highest good in Christ sees a light on the world which is seen by none who have not had this experience. Here is the truth of the theory of value-judgements, which have a place in philosophy even. Whether philosophy shall be materialistic or idealist depends on the value assigned to matter or mind. Whether it shall be optimist or pessimist on the worth assigned to the weal or woe of life. Beauty, truth, goodness, all the ideals of life appeal in different degrees to different men, and a man's world-view will depend, if it is a personal conviction and not a conventional opinion, on the significance which he assigns to each. Liberty, immortality, God, ideas of the practical reason, mean much or little to a man according to the estimate he practically has formed of life and duty. Value-judgements are not, therefore, peculiar to religion, nor do they cut off its knowledge from all other. An important practical consequence, however, follows from the recognition of the importance for religious knowledge of this sense of value. The religious man, who has this sense, may confidently reject the criticism of the objects of faith which is offered to him by the irreligious man who lacks it, even as the musician may scorn the censure of the deaf, or the painter the blame of the blind. There is a realm of reality which religion alone can enter and explore, and on which science and philosophy can pronounce neither approval nor condemnation. The pious man, in so far as he is dealing with objects of faith, can confidently face all their pretensions, and be sure that they cannot take away his certainty.

(4) It must be recognized, however, that as the objects of faith in the Christian religion present themselves not only in the supersensuous region of the spiritual and ideal, but in historical reality, it is impossible to make religious knowledge quite indifferent to science and philosophy. To take a few questions, certain events are recorded in the Holy Scriptures, which faith regards as miraculous, as not explicable by the ordinary course of nature as familiar to our common experience, but as evidences of divine guidance and bounty. Religion is not concerned to prove that these events are due to a divine interference with nature—that is a theory of miracles which may or may not be true—but it is concerned to hold that these events did actually take place. Whether the miracles of Christ are an absolute breach in the continuity of nature or not is a secondary question; the primary is this, did He heal the sick, calm the storm, rise from the dead? If science denies even the possibility of these events, then theology cannot shirk the task of showing that science is incompetent to deal with the question, as the reality which it has observed and explained does not warrant it in pronouncing on the limits of possibility in a region which it has not explored. If philosophy denies the probability of such events, theology can ask philosophy whether it has so solved the problem of sin, suffering, and death, as to disprove the necessity for such a divine redemption from the evils of life. If criticism denies the trustworthiness of the records, theology must carefully examine the grounds of this denial. It can be proved that the records inspire confidence by their mental sanity, their moral sincerity, and their religious elevation, that the portrait of Jesus they present is so harmonious, beautiful, perfect, that it cannot be regarded as an invention, but only as a copy of reality, that distrust can be awakened only if an attitude of incredulity towards the supernatural is assumed. It

seems certain to me that much that is asserted in name of historical method is really due to this incredulity. Whether there is a supernatural, whether miracles are possible, these are questions, which neither science nor philosophy, apart from religion, can answer, but of which faith holds the key. If it could be proved that Christ, as He exists for faith, has no reality, even if it could be proved that Jesus was not what the Gospels represent Him to have been, then certainly the whole character of our faith would be changed. But history has not the means to yield such a proof, and over against the suspicions and surmises of criticism we can put the certainties of our experience of Christ's saving power. In the present intellectual situation, if the legitimate functions of science and philosophy are distinguished from the specious pretensions advanced in their name, faith need not be afraid, but may be of good cheer, for there is no knowledge truly man's which can take away its Lord.

(5) At the beginning of this discussion the standpoints of science, philosophy, and theology were distinguished as due to the difference of the objects of knowledge, world, self, and God. Whether we subordinate science and philosophy to theology, as I believe we ought to do, depends on the value we assign to our knowledge of each of these objects. Although God is the wider and higher and richer conception than world or self, yet if our knowledge of God is more defective than our knowledge of world and self, theology cannot advance its claim to primacy. Only if we believe that God has so revealed Himself to us, that in the light of our knowledge of Him we can understand the meaning and worth of all finite existence as otherwise we could not, can we confidently make our consciousness of God regulative of all our thought. The answer to all such questions as those discussed above depends ultimately on what we value most—

our perception of the world, our reflexion on ourselves, or our vision of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. To the man who so sees God the problem of the world and self has been solved, and his religious knowledge has a value greater far than all science and all philosophy.

ALFRED E. GARVIE.