

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

power, which they have received from holy and divine Baptism.

The end of the Exposition of the holy mysteries of Baptism.

R. A. AYTOUN.

PERSONALITY AND GRACE.

I. PERSONALITY AND SYSTEM.

UGHT not a study of the relation of personality and grace to begin with a systematic account of personality? We cannot say that such a beginning is not necessary. The subject is not so simple that it admits of no misunderstanding and though every one has direct knowledge of its nature, to be taught how to see is life's most difficult lesson, and there is nothing we see so partially as ourselves.

It is more important, however, to begin by realising that there is something in personality which eludes all systematic exposition, which is even inimical to all systematising. The personal element is precisely the variable, incalculable element in our experience, the thing not to be measured and tabulated and arranged. In every age it has been the despair of the systematiser, nor, in spite of some lip service, ever more than in our own.

By its disturbing effect upon his theory, the scientist is harassed into materialism. The idea that materialism is a positive conclusion regarding life is an illusion. When the materialist is not engaged in the task of securing peace for his scientific aims, he thinks about life like the rest of us mortals, which would be a thing impossible, if he had, as he avers, really caught the scene-shifter pulling the ropes. Exactly as we do, he reprobates and approves. Like Shylock, he has in addition to "hands, organs, dimensions," also

“senses, affections, passions.” Nor is he able, outside of his study, to dismiss them as irrelevant to action. With weighty argument he proves that motion is the cause of all personal doings as the weight alone accounts for the doings of the clock. As when the machinery brings the hand to twelve, it sets free the striking apparatus at the same moment, so the physiological machinery sets free at the same moment the sense of willing and the act. Yet, in practical life, the believer in that view does not seem even to try to overcome the notion that things happen because he wills. He has even been known to fall into a rage with other persons, as if his doings and theirs were not both on his theory the mere shadow of a procession of puppets shaking on a string. What turns so human a person to materialism is not any discovery about life, or for that matter any positive conclusion at all, but the quite human motive of exasperation at the havoc which the bare idea of moral personality makes in his system.

Apart from personality, the world of matter and motion seems expressly made for being put into text-books. Sound is vibration, heat is vibration, light is vibration. Why should not life also be vibration and thought vibration and will vibration? Why should they enjoy the special privilege of disturbing the satisfaction which comes from measuring things, and even humiliate the measurer by the sense of being incalculable, as well as so far not calculated?

To turn to personality is like turning from the electric wire to the telegraph message. Vibration itself is no longer a simple affair of arithmetic. It is changed into an amazing Morse system with meanings which mock at quantity. The difference between one vibration and two is the difference between squalor and splendour, prose and poetry, death and life. A world as colourless and meaningless as the vibration of a telegraph wire is turned into a world as

vivid and significant as the laughter and tears in a telegraph message.

What is left for the systematiser to do in that strange iridescent medley of a world, except to try his hardest to ignore it? He attends to the telegraph wire and calls the message an epiphenomenon. Then, as a physician can ignore nightmare as an epiphenomenon of indigestion, he may ignore personal thought and feeling as epiphenomena of material motion. The cause of his materialism is thus the quite natural, but also, let us not forget, the quite personal desire, to get on with one's work and be master of one's situation.

The philosopher cannot so easily dismiss personality as the scientist, because professedly it is the first object of his study. The moment he begins to systematise, however, he finds it equally inconvenient. As he cannot turn it out of doors, he tries to argue it into submission.

Modern philosophy began when Descartes discovered that the basis of all reality is the thinking person. But he at once turned his attention to the thinking and ignored the person. So long as the thinking was clear and consequent, everything was right. Soon it was argued that thought and extension could not affect each other, but must be parallel, or be aspects of monads, or be conveniently kept in step with each other by God. Such views merely showed how completely personality was ignored.

In consequence modern philosophy did not really find its freedom till Hume challenged the right of the personality to consider that it existed at all. "It must," he said, "be some impression which gives rise to every clear idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference." Thinking, it seemed, could thus be brought comfortably within the philosopher's grasp. It was simply a

measurable stream of impressions. The disturbing appendage to it of the person who not only thought, but was interested in thought mainly according to his feelings and actions, and who put, through his feelings and actions, all kinds of incalculable qualities into its thinking, was jettisoned without splash or ripple. Every impression, Hume had to admit, still continued to have this amazing reference to self. Impressions were like the crew of a ship which continued to move in a certain order. Though they all had a curious habit of watching the cabin, it was only a habit and did not mean that the captain had anything to do with the series of proceedings, or that any captain inhabited there at all.

When the importance of this habit of looking to the cabin could not be overlooked, Kant fell upon the idea that this might be the key to the order. This habit of looking to the cabin was essential to keeping the sailors going the fixed round. With that idea he named self, the "synthetic unity of apperception." It did not do anything. It was no captain to issue orders. But it was vital to the order that existed around it, an ideal point to which everything looked.

When it still persisted in dominating the situation, Hegel made the greatest of all philosophical attempts at a truce with it. He would admit that the personality was real, he would go farther and assert that it was the sole reality, but on one condition. It must realise that it is not personal. It is universal, it is absolute. In it the Absolute comes to self-consciousness. Its law of thought is the law of ultimate reality. That being granted, a universal system of thought will rise refulgent above the welter of personal life, as the calm moon over the troubled sea. Unfortunately the personality still feels that its real needs, in a world which from one point of view seems to be of God, and from another of the devil, have been ignored not removed. Consequently

the main result of the truce has been to raise the question of the moral personality more aggressively than ever.

The moralist, being concerned with personal ideals and their personal application, might be expected to show still more forbearance towards the moral personality. However philosophically he may say that life is one, he at least cannot ignore its moral conflict. The practical dualism of a world we can make ours by a right use, and a world that offers every temptation to a wrong, he may not ignore. But the moment he proceeds to systematise, whether it be for theoretical or for practical purposes, he knows, just as little as any other systematiser, what to do with personality.

Is he occupied in seeking a moral theory, he seizes upon some one principle like pleasure or reason and conceives it passing straight through the moral personality or, when that view manifestly does not agree with experience, man being no direct or exclusive vehicle either of pleasure or reason or any other single principle, he seeks some explanation of why it bends, which will show that in all variety of motive it is simply seeking the most rapid way through all media, as light passing through air and water.

This is most conspicuously true of Utilitarianism. The Utilitarian would persuade us that the personality can never be anything but a vehicle for the one law of what pleases or of what is profitable, which is what pleases at long range. The strongest impulse, just like the strongest force in all other cases, must prevail, and that in proportion to its strength.

When it becomes manifest that the difference between a person and a thing just lies in this, that a person is not driven by forces *a tergo*, it is plain also that this simple law of pleasure as a force embraces hardly any of the facts. What parallelogram of forces would give the diagonal of the attractions of a drinking bout and of a martyrdom? We may

speak of both as pleasure if we will, but when quality so triumphantly makes little of quantity, something new and strange has entered from the personality itself.

The source of the difference is doubtless personal character. That hint the systematiser again seizes upon. If action is determined by character, and character by previous action, and previous action by previous character, how is there any escape from ascribing it all to the Absolute and regarding it all as the direct line of a direct force ?

Unfortunately, this beautifully simple scheme ignores the only moral question of any importance. How is it that a man may be influenced in a right way by his character and improve, and in the wrong way and degenerate ? In answer we are told by Kant and other people that we can only improve if we attend rigorously to the law of the personality itself. That law announces a universal legislation and we can only save ourselves from the vagaries and ruin of desire by obeying it from the pure motive of reverence alone. Though that is a great and vital truth, something is still omitted from the scheme. This appears from the colourless world into which the system introduces us. All real morals are fundamentally and supremely personal, but here nothing ever is really personal at all, and the result is a moral vacuum, not a moral world.

The practical systematiser, even more than the theoretical moralist, is disturbed by the claims of the moral personality. When he falls back upon a scheme like mechanical socialism the cause is merely that the worry of finding a place for personality has driven him to despair.

To all makers of ideal republics from Plato downwards personality has been a kind of *Poltergeist*, a mischievous, hobgoblin sort of ghost in their well regulated households. It is constantly led by reasons beneath reason, and occasionally, to the systematiser's utter confusion, above reason.

It worships beauty and leaves ugliness everywhere in its track ; it creates amazing wealth and deplorably misapplies it ; it gives its life for its children and also casts them defenceless upon the world. Its most calculating self-love will sometimes turn into the most uncalculating self-devotion. The only certainty is that the largest experience does not enable us to calculate either its nobility or its meanness.

But for that disturbing element, an earthly paradise might be created by act of parliament to-morrow. Were it not that every man has his own idea of an earthly paradise and that some, for wholly undefinable reasons, give all earthly paradises whatsoever to the dogs, the reform of society would be an easy task.

But what can be done so long as men insist on forming their own ties and appealing to their own consciences ? Against erratic appeals to affection and conscience what headway can the infinitely wiser and happier regulations the systematiser would appoint for men, ever hope to make ? If there is a Providence and He made such a creature to be led by such unreliable personal guides, His work stands in great need of being improved upon, seeing what an appalling hindrance it is to the work of building the social edifice with square and plumbline. All this merely shows that the moralist also has a very human desire to get on with his particular business.

The theologian must entertain personality even more hospitably than the moralist. Is he not concerned with the saving of the individual soul ? Moreover, does he not profess that only by personal things like faith, repentance, holiness, can it be saved ?

Yet he too finds personality the unmanageable element in his systematising. Upon him indeed come the desires of all the systematisers. He has the need of the man of science : he would know God as a direct calculable force.

He has the need of the philosopher : he would see all men simply reflecting the Absolute in doctrine and worship. He has the need of the practical organiser : he would have a church all marching in one step.

Moreover, he has great resources not at the disposal of others. He has a material force in the fear of hell, a philosophical force in the doctrine of infallibility, and an organising force in the clergy. So long as they are in full operation, he feels at ease with personality. He may even speak kindly of it. On its good behaviour it is a reflection of God. But, when his forces weaken, the personality becomes for him a mere anarchic monster of the abyss, pulling down the pillars not of his system alone, but of the heavens, an emanation from the pit which even ecclesiastical anathema is not strong enough adequately to denounce.

On this subject the theologian has no lack of matter.

Does the personality appeal to intellect ? Even in this little life, who knows what a day may bring forth ? Beyond that is a black line, across which for human knowledge all is darkness. Then the testimony of our own experience is uncertain and conflicting. Yet if we attempt to enlarge it and correct it by the experience of others, we only meet with still more perplexity and contradiction.

Does the personality take its stand upon conscience ? Consider the variety, the conflict of moral ideals ! One man's meat is another man's poison. The temple prostitute and the thug would, no doubt, have appealed to conscience. How then can any thinking man appeal to conscience as a certain guide ? And, even if it were a possible guide for a life of study and reflection on noble ideals, how can it suffice for those who live in ignorance and humble toil ?

Does the personality urge the independent nature of the will ? Still less than to intellect and conscience may man

trust to will. It knows to do good and does not do it, being weak by nature and corrupt by reason of sin. Man must have come to a desperate state indeed when he places his reliance on something which is a synonym both for vacillation and obstinacy.

In contrast, must it not be plain that, where we deal with the Omniscient, we must have infallible truth ; where we deal with the Supreme, we must have infallible legislation ; where we deal with the Omnipotent we must have infallible succour ? Where we have an infinite force, what need can there be to allow anything for a finite ? Where we consider God, what need have we also to consider man ? The action of omniscience and omnipotence can never be anything but a straight unswerving line. It must speak infallibly and act efficaciously, for is it not self-evident that what is from God cannot be less than absolutely true, absolutely right and absolutely irresistible ?

On that basis theology ought at once to be acknowledged queen of all the sciences and all the philosophies, seeing it alone has what all seek, a direct, unswerving, easily discriminated, wholly determining force. The forces of the scientist operate also in straight lines, but they meet at all angles and with every degree of momentum. To find the diagonal of them, therefore, is seldom more than an approximation. The force of the philosopher is absolute, but it moves through so complex a medium that there have been benighted people who regarded indefiniteness and philosophy as synonymous. If theology has a force nothing deflects, an Absolute no condition varies, it has a simplicity, a certainty and a completeness denied to all other forms of knowledge. Its system is then easy to build, solid and plain and four-square. Faith is acceptance of infallible truth ; justification is being put right with infallible legislation ; regeneration is the influx of infallible grace.

The only doubt possible is that raised by the very completeness of the system. May not the theologian, like the scientist, the philosopher, the moralist, be suffering from the quite human desire of the systematiser to make his system complete ? May not this sacrifice of the personality be only a very personal kind of impatience, the sacrifice, in short, of soul to system ? May it not be that the theologian also is tempted by the very human desire to find it easy to get on with his particular business ?

JOHN OMAN.

IS PAUL'S GOSPEL OUT OF DATE ?

(1) THERE is a wide-spread feeling even within the Christian Church that the Christianity of the future, if it survive the present distress, will not be a copy of the Christianity of the past. Science, philosophy, and criticism are supposed to have been so fatal to its present form, that a renovation seems altogether imperative. The study of comparative religion, and the enterprise of foreign missions have brought Christianity and other religions into so close contact, that a transformation of Christianity by the influence of other faiths is confidently anticipated by some ; and it is expected that the future religion for humanity will be not Christianity alone, but an amalgam of what is truest and best in the religions of the world. In this faith for the coming days the dominant if not exclusive influence is assigned to the teaching and example of Jesus Christ. Whatever is dismissed as temporary and local in Christianity, His truth and grace are commonly acknowledged of permanent value and universal significance. Not so is it, however, with His servant Paul ; there seems to be even an indecent haste to rid Christianity of the accretions supposed to be due to him. What in his teachings and writings is of his own age and surroundings