

## ARTICLE VII.

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS OF RELIGIOUS  
EXPERIENCE.<sup>1</sup>

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FOR several centuries the question "What is experience?" has remained under discussion—an open question. Of course there has been progress in the determining of the import. Kant sought to differentiate experience (*Erfahrung*), science, from reason (*Vernunft*), philosophy. But, after all, Kant was obliged to recognize a supersensuous element in what was experienced. In his endeavor to deliver religion from what was merely captious and fanciful, he has left us perhaps the ablest work on this subject. But under our modern criticism his "Religion within the Limits of Pure Reason" requires revision.

As much as ever, perhaps more than ever, religion tends to run afield. The multiplicity of extravagant differentiations was never before so great. Never before, however, was the wisdom of the wise so ably devoted to the solving of these highest problems. As never before, religion has become rationalized, and is becoming the established possession of the ablest minds. Of course religion has always been the possession of able minds.

Two thousand years ago the Athenians were the foremost

<sup>1</sup>This paper was prepared for the annual meeting of the American Philosophical Association at Columbia University, December 26-28, 1912.

thinkers of the world. But Paul, speaking on Mars' Hill, called attention to the fact that they were worshipers, "very greatly given to worship." They even had an altar to the unknown God. It is as true to-day that not only common minds, but the highest intellects, require the supernal — not merely what is in the region of scientific discovery, but beyond. We simply come to a racial problem, What does the best critical knowledge supply? What can our ablest intellection validate?

#### THE EXISTENCE OF GOD.

Let us, then, briefly summarize a few of the essentials to be established. And first, as to an object of worship, What can we establish concerning the existence of the one Divine Being? Some still claim that he is unknown; nay, even "unknowable." It may be perfectly true that Science by her finite measuring cannot grasp the infinite. But while the infinite remains uncomprehended, scientifically unknowable, it is still no less reality. Granted a reality is unlimited, it is not the less valid; nay, all the more valid. Space is all the more decidedly real because unmeasured, because unmeasurable. Something is everywhere. Here omnipresence asserts itself. If it is impossible to recognize a limit to space; so, as well, is it impossible to recognize more than one omnipresence.

Furthermore, as to the attributes of the one supreme divine reality, minds exist. They must have a cause. The cause, of course, equals the effect. All the possibilities of the mental must inhere in the producer of the mental. God, as the one first absolutely universal causal reality, must possess all the possibilities of mind — intellection, emotion, volition. As to the rationality, the consistency, of the miraculous, science

fails to prove that a higher law may not develop mutation without any rupture of existing regimen.<sup>1</sup>

Given a divine mind infinite in knowledge and power, unlimited in wisdom, yes, wisdom and love; and philosophy supplements the field of science. A perfect causal God possesses perfect control. He can bless with infinite ease. It is unquestionably philosophical to worship, to petition, a Being of infinite perfection. Children upon earth may bring their adorations to a Father in heaven. Not a speechless ruler, but a Father who may communicate his presence, his gifts. And there is no measure to the possible wealth of his bestowment. His children may plead "Our Father," for he is the cause; and, seeking, they find. Their conscience becomes inspired. The faithful at once enter joy. Man finds there is a princely power developing around him, a personal presence, a heavenly kingdom even in his own spirit. And so a divine kingship dawns upon the earth.

#### MAN IMMORTAL.

We have found that as man the philosopher discerns God, he as well becomes discoverer of his own potential. He is made for the Divine, made to be a son. And here we reach the verity that man is not simply a temporary figment. He is created for the eternal. He freely puts upon himself a perfect regimen. But, with limited intelligence, and incompetency to remove penalty, he requires for his perfecting an unlimited era. Perfectness demands immortality. And so the human unit has a vision of a career, postulates an unending career. As God's completed handiwork we become identified with the infinite Creator, part and parcel of the highest, the unending, the best.

<sup>1</sup> See article "Evolution and the Miraculous," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. lxxv. (1908) pp. 572-585.

## VALIDATION OF FREEDOM.

This brings us to the farther inquiry, What is the evidence that man is free? First of all, let us again acknowledge the inadequacy of scientific investigation. Freedom as involving origination is beyond the range, the grasp, of discovery. Science must follow lines of causation. As an absolute beginning cannot be determined, we cannot discover what is free. Let us, then, acknowledge at once that science is incompetent to verify the existence of our free volition. But, as we have seen, our mind demands as well as discovers. Here man's philosophy enters the arena. Man as conscious of his freedom has rational as well as physical insight. He holds himself responsible. What he wills he causes. And, inasmuch as he possesses the liberty, he takes penalties, pays the price of liberty. Man is equipped with a conscience. He has evidently native preferences. But because he has motives based on free choices, he must recognize his responsibility.

He may perfect himself unlimitedly. He may pervert himself beyond recovery. He feels the need of a Divine helper. Where a necessity is upon him, he calls for aid. His freedom may be his destruction. Nevertheless, he grasps the freedom. Man as thus conscious of his liberty brings us again to the fact that man is a praying creature. He finds there is deliverance in waiting. He may seek, he may find, deliverance, peace. So, even in the terrestrial, there comes the prelude of the heavenly. Yes, by seeking, man finds heaven, finds God, finds self. This finding is the prerogative of his spiritual vision. The highest reality is spiritual. To those who deserve, the light comes. The pure in heart win the blessing. They see God. The supreme reality is reached, is possessed. Not by the eye, not by the ear. As spirit we are identical with the supernal, the image of God. By his Spirit,

God reveals the things prepared for those who love him. The truth, the light, the realization, comes. Our spiritual vision brings us to the zenith of our endowment. We see ourselves.<sup>1</sup> We see the inspirer of our highest blessedness. We reach identification. Hell is characterized as outer darkness. And philosophy, finding the light, reveals to us the possibilities of our rational attainments; yes, the possible ruin in case the light is undeveloped.

#### EVOLUTION OF THE SPIRITUAL.

But the possibilities of religious experience have farther verifications. As we have seen, man is religious because he is rational. What, now, of added proofs in the process of man's development? Habit not only keeps us fixed; it adds, it builds. Aristotle taught us that every action has a *hexis*, tends to fixity. Our habits build. We create, rather recreate, ourselves by our lines of habituation. We say, Practice makes perfect. And the perfections following our practice do not remain simply subjective. They are carried over to the external world. The architect builds from within quite as much as from without. Our demand for the Beautiful is to be supplied not so much by the objective world, by our going to Mother Nature, as by evolving, developing, our own increment, our own subjective creative function. We satisfy our demands, meet our necessities, as rational beings, not so much by thinking as by doing.

And here Aristotle taught that the sculptor who produces the perfect statue has produced within himself an image of disciplined energy equally perfect. So then, by our doing, we are constantly building. Now the zenith of fine art is the

<sup>1</sup> See Vortrag über das Wesen der Seele. Von Dr. Rudolf Focke. Philosophische Vorträge herausgegeben von der Philosophischen Gesellschaft zu Berlin. Neue Folge. 6 Heft.

free, the perfect, the absolute. Art tends to develop what our unaided sense cannot; to detect, to develop for us, the divine in the human. The physically unseen, unheard absolute thus evolved becomes the apprehensive content of our vision and hearing. Painting and sculpture culminate in revelations of the heavenly. Our subjective vision is evolved, finds its realization in the objective world. In the field of art the eyes are fascinated by the created apprehension of the epi-phenomenal. In painting, do we not reach the delectation of our vision by the revelation of the divine in personalities? And as well, in the symphonies and choruses, the ear catches the symmetries that enable music to inspire us with transcendent revelations. Pitch and rhythm and harmony,— what may they enable, what may they reveal to us?

Philosophy gives us the import of art. It shows us beauty as the ecstatic apprehensible sunlight of truth, transcending phases of the absolutely real. Thus the artistic visions of the supersensuous bring to man the acme of delight. Philosophy, then, is not so much a search for truth as for the enjoyment of truth. The higher the truth, the higher the joy. Philosophy is thus named from the emotion—the joy giving the name—philosophy the love of, the enjoyment of, wisdom.

To become wise in knowing ourselves—finding, discovering, our altitude, our divine identity—brings us transcending felicity. Our hidden possibilities need to be evolved.<sup>1</sup> Moses found that the moral is handed down from God. The moral seen in its transcendence is identical with the Divine. We have vision of our identity more and more by evolution of our possibilities. The Sermon on the Mount may become for us realistic, simply subjective. And the secret of our development is practical life. Our doing develops our consciousness, our

<sup>1</sup> See Rudolf Eucken, *The Life of the Spirit*.

vision, step by step. Here, then, is the final secret of our religious growth, of our religious felicity. If practice makes perfect, the higher the practice the higher the stage of perfection, the more the transcendent result, the sermon on the mount, the handing down from God.

#### RELIGION AS SERVICE.

We have come, then, to the concrete fact that religion is developed by our serving. Service brings the revelation, solves the mysteries. Now experience becomes what Kant called the "practical reason." What mere theory could not resolve, practice brings to light. Our religious experience, then, our philosophy, practical philosophy, becomes in us the light of the world<sup>1</sup>—not mere science handling terrestrial phenomena, the visible heavens, but the personal revelation, the glory that excelleth. Now beauty unifies heaven and earth; truth establishes its kingship within; the right is one with the heavenly; the good in full sense is God himself. Now the existence of the Divine Being becomes the central unity in the absolutely real. Spirit to our higher vision becomes the identification of the self with the All-glorious, the son with the ever-present Father.

We no longer ask for proofs of the existence of the one Divine Being. It is the validity of the mere earthly that may be called in question. Nay, even, the solution of terrestrial problems will be found in the celestial radiance. From the earthly standpoint every man's opinion may appear a necessity. But our freedom meets even necessity. The problems we resolve, no longer put a necessity upon us. In the lower ranges, of course, differences will always appear. But they

<sup>1</sup> See article "Christ and Philosophy," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, vol. lxvii. (1910) pp. 284-298.

leave us free, with unlimited possibilities. As we serve, the love of wisdom will inspire the greatest depths. Problems of course will continue to follow problems.<sup>1</sup> But the most deep and high will continue to add to our blessedness. More and more we discover the Divine, but of course can never exhaust the field of discovery.

Problems will always follow problems. But peace that passes understanding will continue to attend our serving. When we have brought in all the tithes, the windows of heaven are opened, blessings are poured out, handed down from God. We appreciate more and more how the good and faithful enter fruition. Service gives us strength. We become a part of God's right hand. At his "right hand there are pleasures forevermore." No farther question as to the existence of the Divine Being. A part of his right hand, nothing can separate us. Yes, now we, God's children, become united each to each. Our freedom involves endless differences, but religion unifies. We freely choose what binds us together. If religion involves unlimited differentiation, it as well involves unlimited unification, harmonization.

#### SUNDRY DIFFICULTIES.

Socialism seems to develop a break, a turmoil. However, let the principle "Love thy neighbor as thyself" become regnant, and all the strifes of Socialism will bind themselves in harmony. If at present we have the zenith of diversity, we have as well the free service bringing in complete unity.<sup>2</sup>

But, it will be answered, these claims of higher vision are

<sup>1</sup> See *Matière et Mémoire. Essai sur la Relation du Corps à l'Esprit.* Par Henri Bergson.

<sup>2</sup> See Professor Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (especially Part VI., *The Methods of Advance*); also Stelzle, *American Social and Religious Conditions.*

tenets of Mysticism. We don't recognize the validity of the Mystic claim. This suggests the question as to higher vision, What is most real, the material or the spiritual? Does not even Physics recognize that atoms of matter may, after all, be stored centers of energy? Matter is not valid ultimate. Even the physicist would recognize mind as superior to body. If, now, a man practically has doubts concerning the valid testimony of spiritual truths, we have but to inquire, Have you tested what you have set aside? Has your practice covered every fact that you reject? Has your service involved all recognized duties? Have you utilized all the talents, all the light, you had? The dilemma, the doubt, the darkness, are the result of unfaithfulness. Infidelity is literally unfaithfulness (in-fidelity, non-fidelity). Doing duty brings light, increases faith.

The faithful are literally full of faith. And faith becomes substance. The faithful validate, realize more and more. To walk by faith is to verify the higher light, to incorporate the higher life. The evidence becomes all-sufficient. We may verily claim that the man cannot be found who has utilized completely the light he has, doing duty as far as known, and yet fails to find adequate light, assurance, guidance. As to the Mystic development, let us bear in mind that we are in the arena of complete freedom with partial knowledge. The opportunity to run wild was never greater. There is call for the most genuine philosophy; yes, for a Divine helper. We are reminded of Hegel's claim that the highest reality is a union of opposites.

Our religious experience is unlimitedly diversified, but wonderfully inclusive. Religion, however, as we have seen, is becoming rationalized. The truth is making free indeed. Let us multiply our service. Thus we open the gates. "The right-

eous nation that keepeth truth may enter." The philosophy of our religious evolution, then, brings us to this the complete culmination, to the fact that the opening of the gates of light and truth and freedom and fruition is being accomplished. The problems of labor and capital, production and competition, mysticism and skepticism, are to be solved, are being solved, by working in the higher light faithfully, God working in us, our developing experience bringing the victory.