

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 *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php

ARTICLE III.

PHILOSOPHY AND RELIGION: THEIR RELATIONS AND RESULTS.

BY THE REVEREND JAMES LINDSAY, D.D.

THERE are few more hopeful signs in the thought of recent times than the drawing-together of philosophy and her elder sister, religion. Asperities have been softened, antagonisms removed. They have had their harmonies of aim and result, while retaining divergence of process and method. Philosophy has ennobled the spirit of religion; religion has reënforced the strength of philosophy. Each has been seen to be necessary to the other; each has at times tried to absorb the other. Philosophy has no deeper problems than that craving for absolute values in the sphere of truth, and that demand for ultimate spirituality, which religion carries with it. For the philosopher, no less than for the religionist, the fundamental reality of the universe can only be spirit: its highest energy can be no other than that of spirit. Philosophy finds God to be the *prius* of the universe—its Ultimate Ground and the Fundamental Reality. But it knows him, not only as he reveals himself in the universe, but also as he reveals himself to the religious consciousness. The Absolute Being can be no less than personal spirit: the personal and self-conscious alone can love. For philosophy and religion alike, the acme of personality is in God; and, for both, personality is the highest blossoming of man's conscious spiritual life.

The presupposition of any religious grounding on the inner side of religion clearly lies in the spiritual nature,

affinities, and possibilities of man,—a nature to which the spiritual world is the great reality, a reality that is being built up by his creative energies and activities in their part and measure. The reality, inwardness, and depth of the spiritual life itself, or in its essence, is that which this spiritually creative religion must maintain. But, while religion solves, in its own practical way, the difference between the Deity and man, philosophy has its own call to explain this very problem. Religion has no more urgent need than to be lifted above the workings of the merely subjective and individual, narrowly human, affective, and practical self, into the lofty sphere of the universal. There the broadest culture is realized, and the vast whole of life and reality—or of human possibility—is apprehended.

These are services which philosophy stands always ready to render. Philosophy and religion coalesce in their aim—each to produce, in its own way, a new world out of the warring elements that go to make up the world that is. For philosophy does not merely, as is so often said, interpret the world of reality, but, in so doing, also lays open a new world—a world of thought—hidden from the senses. The new world of religion is that of spiritual creation, in which the new-creating power of love is supremely seen in ever-brightening, ever-developing forms of spiritual personality. Religion seeks the truth: the truth which for it stands above all other truth is love. Philosophy, too, seeks the truth: it finds it in that thought or reason which is able to survey all religious feeling and to probe our deepest experience.

What does philosophy imply? A survey of reality of the most universal sort, in which the great verities and transactions of religion take their necessary place. And what does religion import? A fact world-wide in its manifestations; it means the reality of the supersensible world, the kingdom of God's infinite love and grace set up

amongst us here and now. On the historic field, the supreme certainty and incomparable excellence of this new world are brought near to us in the personality of Jesus. Religion finds it new, and philosophy proves it true.

Related philosophy and religion thus most closely are in their aims and ends; but each retains a spirit, and pursues a path, of its own. The religious viewpoint is that of faith; the standpoint of philosophy is that of thought or reason. The harmonies of religion and philosophy thus arise only as faith is rational, and as reason is believing. Kant had a clear perception that, in this rational element, religion had its closest approximation to philosophy, even though many things may yet exist beyond the ken of reason pure and simple. There is a rationalism of its own required by religion no less than philosophy makes rationalism its requirement. Religion concerns itself with the whole man,—mind, heart, and will,—and is, from the psychological standpoint, wider and richer than philosophy, which is confined to the working of man's intellect. Not that philosophy does not treat the things of feeling and will, but that it does so in theoretic fashion. Jacobi at least made it impossible to treat feeling, as Schopenhauer made it impossible to treat will, with such neglect; while Hegelian idealism has had the merit of teaching to express feeling in terms of thought. Religion, too, may of course become philosophic, and inquire into the laws, limits, and processes of our thinking, as philosophy teaches us to do. But, while philosophy maintains a theoretic attitude and rational relation, religion is distinguished by its more practical relation of spiritual obedience to higher principle or personality. So, then, philosophy shows us the truth; religion gives us life.

But, again, they are not so sundered as they look; for truth is for life, and life is for truth. So at least we dare to put the case. Indeed, the religious demand of obedience

is nowhere more finely realized than in loyal surrender to the truth, in accordance with philosophic emphasis. Man is not less bound to know than he is to love; but, however his knowledge may have worth in itself, truth and love must always in him coexist. For the whole possibilities of his nature must be realized, and there is no real dualism between knowledge and life. Philosophy and religion are both concerned with one vast inquiry,—that of ultimates or first principles; such ultimates as the Primal Ground and the Person of the Christ. Does philosophy, then, differ from religion in finding that our increased sense of the vitality of the universe, and our deepened hold on the immanence of the life of Deity, have weakened faith in the Personality of God? By no means, for philosophy disclaims impersonality no less decidedly than does religion. The scientific habit of mind is called to deal with aspects of the cosmos that may not make faith in the Absolute Personality easy, but a higher rationality will transcend that habit of mind. For it will perceive that, though science may have no need of our spiritual hypotheses, there are deeper reasons for holding them.

Philosophy, no less than religion, decisively rejects the sufficiency of the belauded immanence theories of our time. Because He is *in* the world, the world is absurdly deified, and really set above Him. As if, the universe being, so to speak, his environment, He were not free to transcend it! Hence the utter inadequacy of such theories as a complete explanation of the universe. This preëminence of immanence is claimed so strongly in some of the idealistic presentations, that God is reduced to complete subservience to a "scientific" conception of his relation to the universe, in which he—supposedly the Absolute Personality—is denied such power of free and "exceptional" initiative, as we should deem it monstrous for men to deny to personality in ourselves. The fundamental lack in such

cases is grasp of the implicates of a real conception of God. Neither religious thought nor true philosophy must for a moment falter in claiming for God all the possibilities so involved in Absolute Personality, working in perfect freedom. Philosophy and religion are both fatuous and blind, if they do not see that just upon the basis of such divine possibilities must rest the whole religious superstructure of fact, doctrine, and ideal.

Philosophy, for all that has now been said, joins with religion in maintaining that no mere Being of transcendent order is sufficient to set up religion for us. Such a Being has not yet worth or value for us. So comes it that, by his spiritual power and working, he must enter into real relation with us. A higher world he sets up within the world we see, and, above all, within the life of man. But then, it is said, such transcendence as there is, is only an inference from immanence, and so is a "secondary" consideration. Now, no doubt, God pervades the universe as we know it. But, by what right shall we make immanence, rather than transcendence, the real note of the Divine relationship? By what right shall we make events of one order—an order "deriving from Divine necessity"? Because God is in the world, and all things are through him and to him, are we therefore to deny that he is before all things, for that he was before them? And is the order of events so necessitated that his volitional working no more raises him above and beyond the world? For our relative finite experience the transcendence remains so real, and, in view of the just demands of thought, so necessary, that we must claim for it the primacy, and refuse to make it only a "secondary" consideration. No reason is there why the Divine Life should be a segregated thing, as in some deistic sort, instead of the Divine Personality being for us renewed or rejuvenated in the life universal.

Certain forms of idealism have held that a world with-

out God is irrational, and that a God without the world would be equally irrational. It is perhaps enough that we do not know the one without the other; but we can, and must, think of God as having a life of his own, and existing in and for himself. Working in freedom, he works *in*, but also *upon*, the world. Not from the *outside* only does he work, for he is ever *within* the universe. But he is free to work upon it, as also *above* it, in his transcendent love and power. These things make his self-revealings possible. And the possibilities must be infinitely great, as he is infinitely free so to work. Hence arise spiritual facts, events, transactions, in the historic field. The presence of God in the universe, then, does not keep us from distinguishing him from the universe, and maintaining for him, as supramundane and self-existing subject, an existence in and for himself. Till then, he is not God.

The religious consciousness renders here, in our view, the highest service towards the clarifying of philosophical thought, when it shows how much the religious interest owes to this very transcendence of Deity; since it is in the ceaseless interaction of immanence and transcendence that our spiritual life becomes filled with its deepest and richest contents. And, indeed, we ask, Must we cast the religious consciousness into the abyss, as the price we pay for immanence? Such a procedure is not in the line of our philosophy. The truth is, a supplementing or completing of one-sidedness is here the real need. Time was when, in Oriental thought, transcendence assumed overbalancing proportions, and the world side receded; while the same result happened to Occidental thought, but in less theoretic and more practical form.

But now we see immanence overbalancing, alike on the sides of man and of the world; while the Divine is shunted always more. What is really needful and perfectly practicable is, to do justice to both these moments, or to

seek out some higher conscious unity which shall mean the harmony or agreement of both. So shall we have advanced far forward in the solving of the mystery. For then, out of the very manifoldness of the question will have sprung a deeper answer, as each phase is allowed to exercise a properly modifying influence on the other. Truth must ever be kept before us as a unity. Philosophy is no more than a part of that whole of truth in which we believe. Whether it be truth of religion or truth of philosophy, it is one truth in which we believe—truth self-consistent and all-embracing. It is the eternal reality and infinite objectivity of truth in which, whether as religionists or philosophers, we believe. So we come to know the depth of the saying, *Veritas fortior omnibus*.

But, in this unmeasured stress on the objectivity of truth, it is by no means meant that, either for religion or philosophy, a truth-loving spirit is for us less than a primary requirement. A reverential, truth-loving spirit lies at the base of all religion: as Goethe said, "The greatest blessing that can befall a thinking man is to fathom what can be fathomed, and silently to adore the unfathomable." But that unfathomed world, which lies beyond reality, as we know it, and try to exhaust it, is a world which calls for truth, and reverence for its philosophical investigation also. For the philosopher reads the highest phases of his own being into the Divine or transcendent essence, and will reflect therein his own truth-seeking and spiritually-formed personality. The feeling of awe and reverence in presence of the Infinite falls upon religionist and philosopher alike, only the feeling objectifies itself in the conceptual products of the philosopher's mind. These philosophic formulations are yet but transient and accidental features of religion. The truth is, philosophy and religion must neither of them be dependent on the other; yet just as little can they be separated from each other.

Deep-laid in human nature is the necessity for each of them. Man's religious instincts crave that he shall have eternal life in the midst of time—shall find something really and permanently valuable persisting through every change and transformation. Philosophy is a necessity of man's mental life, which otherwise should remain lacking in clearness, depth, and vision. Our religious beliefs are no products of philosophy, for belief springs out of life. But philosophy may judge of our beliefs—of their psychological possibility, ethical significance, and epistemological validity. And, indeed, the subjective necessity which our understanding feels before the truth, as evidenced to us, is often a more helpful and more easily available criterion for us than the objective evidence itself.

Philosophy, it has been said, can bake no bread, but she can give us God, freedom, and immortality. Well, the loss of bread does not greatly matter, for the bread will be found without her; and it is not by bread alone—or even chiefly—that man lives the higher life of the spirit. But, if philosophy should be thought able to give us these three, they are at least guaranteed to us by religion. It is because religion puts us in possession of a real and reasonable freedom of the will that philosophy must still find a place for the realities of indeterministic experience.

One is compelled to differ here from even so able and interesting an ethical philosopher as Professor Paulsen. His procedure is a curious one, though not by any means peculiar to him among present-day philosophers. He will have nothing to do with the freedom of the will in a metaphysical sense, which, by the way, he, like many others, does not very fairly or correctly represent. "Ethics should not permit," he tells us, "the whimsical attempts of a few metaphysicians" to foist such a sense of free-will upon us. And, after finely endeavoring to show the freedom of the

will to mean "the faculty to determine one's life, independently of sensuous impulses and inclinations, by reason and conscience, according to purposes and laws," he goes on to say, that "no one has ever doubted" that man "has such a faculty," and that "this really constitutes the very essence of man." But did it not occur to him that those "few metaphysicians" also might be among those who "never doubted" this aspect of the subject, so far as it goes? Did he not see that he really begs the whole question? And why stigmatize the attempts of these metaphysicians as "whimsical"? The question is, Are the facts and phenomena on which they rely real, and sufficient to warrant the postulation of the metaphysical view? Or, to put it otherwise, Are there facts and phenomena of experience for which Professor Paulsen's views are an insufficient and inadequate explanation? If so, the whimsicality lies in not allowing them due weight and place, and the appeal to number—"few" or many—is a somewhat poor and vulgar criterion in higher matters of the truth. Training, discipline, habit, heredity, resolution, environment, deliberation,—who does not lay as real a stress on these as Professor Paulsen? But they do not exhaust the case for freedom of the will; and, if philosophy cannot bring her teaching into accord with the conspicuous and ever-recurring phenomena presented by religion, then so much the worse will it be for philosophy. It surely should not be "whimsical" so to stake one's appeal on facts.

No doubt our freedom is a conditioned one, bounded by the developments of our original individuality, and by our being in Nature, while transcending it. And, if truth be told, the greatest limiting power on man's real freedom of will is just sin—a too neglected factor in these discussions. But what we are concerned to see is that the aspects of solidarity do not swamp individual life and freedom in an unjust determinism. We can just as fully as determin-

ism lay full stress on psychological exercises and conditions. What we most of all complain of is the way in which the no doubt relative but real incalculable element in man's self or character is neglected; so that room is not left for those free, unexpected moves of will upward to which all religious history and experience, trumpet-tongued, testify. This incalculable element has no right to be treated as though it were a mere chance element. The result is reached along the highest lines of reason, amid the contingency involved.

But, in the kingdom of heaven set up by Paulsen and like philosophers, no prodigals ever amaze us by their "I will arise," no malefactors on life's cross excite our wonder by swift and unexpected assurances being vouchsafed them of "Paradise," and no Sauls of Tarsus smite our ears with unwonted sounds on Damascus roads,—“Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Religion very properly reminds philosophy that every good and perfect gift cometh from above; so, too, does true freedom. So little is character a closed circle that, on the other side, an Apostle bids the man who “thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.” The truth is, the heights and depths of the possibilities of penitence or repentance our deterministic philosophers have neither pierced nor understood. Their freedom of the will, with the necessary import or direction it gives to the development of individuality, is a too dead-level affair, beautiful and true from the most conventional point of view, but quite inadequate as a complete theory of the human will and its freedom. We have to do with more than modern mechanical or scientific modes of thinking: we have to do with life and experience, of which, indeed, science is but a part.

Our deterministic philosophers have missed their way; they merely tell us, As is the tree, so will be the fruits. But they have lost the real point, which is, Make the tree

good, and the fruit will be good. By which it must be remembered, that it belongs to man to say which tree he will be. He is lord of his life, of his will, and may choose what his planting will be—a unique privilege which does not belong to the tree. In the strength of this freedom, man can think and act as he will. It should in every case be true of him, that he is a new thought of God. It is of our own default that “we are born originals, and die copies.” The power morally to differentiate and determine ourselves, and the capability of moral inwardness, prove man to be never the helpless creature of sin. On his originative power does man’s responsibility rest. His is a free but not unmotivated willing: will and motive are active together, and must not be disjoined. What we contend is, that before every act of will there is a primary cause—the self that may and should be free. The will enjoys lordship over the motive, and must not be thought to give way to some unavoidable compulsion before it. Practice makes perfection, and the morally ripe or perfect man is one who has the mastery over his own will.

It ought to be now evident how absurd and unfair it is to speak of the Libertarian view as holding by the causelessness of the will or volition, as if an absolute beginning were postulated in its notion of the originative power of will. It is a beginning in no such absolute sense; that were a manifest absurdity; we are creative, but not the Creator. No one supposes the will to be completely independent of all antecedents. What the indeterminist view maintains is just this, that, in presence of all necessary conditions, the will can determine itself quite otherwise, or hold itself in suspense. With what clearness I am conscious of my own thought, with the same clear consciousness do I know my own freedom of will. Our whole intellectual life would be upset, were this to be denied. Thinking and willing have consciousness of their own ac-

tion all through the world's history, so that freedom has become a universally recognized fact.

Paulsen is therefore mistaken in taking free-will to be merely a fruit of scholasticism. The scholastics took the doctrine from the hands of the universal consciousness of humanity and of the individual; to them it sometimes was freedom of choice, sometimes that very freedom from impulses not consonant with reason, which Paulsen enforces. And even the "few" may turn out only too truly to be Paulsen himself and those who, with him, hold free-will for an illusion; for "few" indeed they are, compared with the universal testimony of humanity. Why should we not distinctly own that our inner experience shows to us that, between motives and the resolutions of our wills, there is no such constant connection as outward observation finds existing between causes and their effects?

We have no right to allow the most evident facts of our inner experience to be flatly contradicted by deterministic hypotheses. The subject demands all the emphasis we give it; for the free-will problem, say what men will, retains a fundamental significance for ethical philosophy, as it does for religion, seeing such freedom contradicts both pantheism and materialism. Our theory of freedom must be of no mere Pelagian sort, but such as will so meet the amazing assertiveness of man's free-will in every phase and type of human experience, that even those manifold and ever-recurring instances, where tremendous moral conflict and deepest self-discovery have obtained, shall be truly and adequately represented.

Then there is the question of immortality. Religion has asserted the necessity of this belief always more confidently in our time, spite of the loud proclamations of the loss of personal immortality made from the extreme evolutionary side. This truth has for religion been no mere product of authoritative revelation, but also an outcome of

man's natural growth and reasonable development, when these have come to their highest. Religion has felt the deep, unalterable necessity that progress run on beyond the gulf of the grave, until perfection be reached by the race in the unity which is in Jesus Christ. For it grows always more certain that here on earth perfection is not to be attained. Our religious consciousness cannot escape the belief in the persistence and permanence of the soul or self. It has an inexpugnable conviction that here we are tending to that vast city of God, whose scale is infinite beyond compare. The Absolute is the Absolute, and we do not at any rate know any reason why we should grow faint in heart or stagger in unbelief before his eternal and illimitable purposes. But philosophy, though sometimes halting and recalcitrant, when not loudly denying the fact of the future life, is a real ally of religion in proclaiming the truth of human immortality.

Philosophy, in so doing, plants its feet on the primal certainties of our being, and the elemental conditions and implications of spirit. How should our ethical philosophy feel otherwise than that a moral universe by its very nature demands a moral end, even the survival and perfection of the human spirit? Philosophy finds such a belief not strictly demonstrable—since it lies, objectively, beyond actual human experience—but yet rationally necessary and necessarily rational. Not all philosophy, however, rises to such heights—not the philosophy that lives in argument or the sphere of the logical understanding alone—but the philosophy which thinks and loves, believes and lives. For it is more than the philosophy of the natural man, which indeed must remain inchoate and imperfect; it is a philosophy with eyes, of which it can be said—

“Philosophy baptized
In the pure fountain of eternal love
Has eyes indeed.”

Such a philosophy is inexorably driven to believe in immortality; the inherent spiritual necessities of the case compel its belief.

Philosophies may remain which treat the belief as a chimera, or so much meaningless jargon; but that weakens none of the grounds of our belief. It only argues a certain defect of vision or lack of moral profundity in the philosophies that know it not. It is religion which has made the task of philosophy doubly difficult when this latter would make man merely mortal, and rob his individual and self-conscious personality of all hope of permanence. Our forecastings or foreshadowings of immortality are, in depth, strength, and volume, just what the whole variegated facts of life and experience have, in their cumulative force, made them. The belief in immortality is always a fruit of the finest experience and the greatest purity and nobility of life. "We needs must love the Highest when we see it."

The theoretic molds of language never can be made to contain, in any adequate form, the vaticinations and convictions inwrought in such life-experience. And who, seeing more than he can so give grounds for, has yet seen the whole? It is not now a question of where, and with what environments, that future life will be; but it is, that real religion and true philosophy both point to the need and certainty of such life, alike as necessary completion of the present, and as necessary aim of the universe. The world, no doubt, carries many illusions; but, if there is anything that gives it a title to be regarded as an honest world, anything in which we may fully and finally rest, it is just the hope, amounting to certainty, which our spiritual nature, in its closest communion with the Divine, proclaims.

What it proclaims is, that "life shall on and upward go," and that man is right when "he thinks he was not made to die." The future or eternal life is not absolutely

other than the life that now is; here and now eternal life is ours, in the midst of time. In and through the life that is, we know the life that is to come. It is thus much more sure and real to us than its mere revelation to us from without would have made it. Fashioner of our frame, and Father of our spirit, in God, as so related to us, we have the ground of all our hope of immortality. Our knowledge of that life may be small; our vision of its possibilities may be dim; but such knowledge is ours as may be adequate for this life, and we are not God. To our knowledge, we add a sure and strong outreaching hope, whose light of immortality glows and burns within us the more brightly as we make the "life more abundant" our own. It was of such relation between the perishing and the Eternal that Francis William Newman, in his "Theism," said:

"But to say that He loves no man is to make religion vain.

Hence it is judged that 'whatsoever God loveth, liveth with God.'"

In view of all that has now been advanced, it seems a clearly-marked-out duty for us, as religionists, to maintain for religion an autonomous worth and sphere, and allow no debasement of its contents, so rich in the unspeakable treasures of personality. In this endeavor we shall have the invaluable support and aid of true philosophy, which shall teach religion to claim that she be sought for her own intrinsic value, as more than all the world beside. For that is an aim with which philosophy must thoroughly sympathize. Never shall those problems of God, freedom, and immortality, towards which religion continually runs out, be solved by the highest thought or culture without the aid of philosophy. The empiric life of the soul hath need of the creative powers of the mind; for truth is one, and reality is one, though known from different sides of approach. The idea and essence of religion, its relation to other domains, its theory of the universe and of reality, its conception and ideal of life,—these all require the aid

of philosophy, if religion is to be thoroughly justified at the bar of scientific reason and conscience.

Religion sets before us the highest type and example, bidding us follow in spirit, not merely in letter. But philosophy helps us realize the great idea of end—end supreme—whose unifying and vitalizing conception binds into living oneness the manifold activities of life. Religion, in the scientific view and treatment of it, must embrace the whole of experience, both inner and outer, in which universal character philosophy will be found its fast ally and firm confederate. For it, too, will be found striving mightily against the materialism and religious indifference of the time, and laying foundations of an idealism in which religion will be able to thrive and prosper. Together, they will thus compass the harmonious blending of faith and knowledge, and set the basal thoughts of religion before men as living things—things of to-day.