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Culture and Faith
The Problem of an Antagonism

The Minister in his Congregation

The Revised Standard Version
An Editorial and an Article

Ecumenicity and Scriptural Authority

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Book Reviews

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Religious Philosophy: A Discussion of Richard Kroner's Book *Culture and Faith*

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THE author of this work is well and favorably known among religious and philosophic thinkers of our day. Before coming to this country he wrote extensively on the philosophy of Hegel in his native German. In recent years he has presented us with several basic works on religion and its relation to modern culture. The present work, "he tells us," "represents a completely new version of a book I published in 1928 under the title *Die Selbstverwirklichung des Geistes: Grundriss der Kulturphilosophie*."

A significant intimation of the tendency of the author's thought is given in the preface when he says, "Today I deviate from both Kant and Hegel and, indeed, from all forms of philosophical idealism in my conviction that the limit of philosophy is determined and also illuminated by faith and theology. I no longer consider religion to be a state in the self-realization of mind or a link in the creative process of culture. I have come to see that the human mind and the divine mind are separated from each other by a chasm which is reflected by the antagonism between culture and faith. Consequently, the new version of my system emphasizes this antagonism and attempts to characterize the relation between the two powers in a more subtle and, I hope, a more adequate fashion." (Preface p. ix).

However, if one should hope that this might indicate an acceptance of the Scriptural doctrine of the creation of man and the world by God, one would be mistaken. For, to accept the doctrine of creation would, for Kroner, be to subordinate the world and everything within it to theology (Preface p. x). And Kroner seeks for "theological philosophy" rather than theology. Accordingly he tells us: "This book proceeds from experience, which is the root and the occasion of all cultural activity" (Preface p. xii).

Starting or proceeding from experience involves, of course, setting the goal for human endeavor in terms of this same human experience. The delineation of man's cultural task is not to be taken from the Genesis account. It is not the Creator who tells man what he must accomplish in the course of history; it is man himself who sets his own ideals.

Proceeding from experience and delineating the goal of experience in terms of experience involves also the measuring of the progress towards reaching

the goal of experience in terms of experience as self-explanatory.

Human experience must therefore, according to Kroner, be self-reflexive and self-explanatory. The place of Faith can, on this basis, evidently, be supplemental only. And Faith that is merely supplemental to culture is not the historic Christian Faith.

Introduction

In seeking to illuminate the account of experience philosophically, it is well, says Kroner, to see what philosophy can and what it cannot do. In distinction from science philosophy deals with "the question of the ultimate meaning of life" (p.2). But any account of experience dealing with the "whole of experience" is bound to beg the question. "The philosopher cannot step out of his system; whatever he may adduce as testimony to his basic principles is already informed by them" (p. 1). Accordingly, "philosophy, as it were, pays the price for its adventurous and hazardous enterprise by an ever new start and an ever new collapse" (p.2).

Philosophy must therefore be critical rather than speculative. Man must not pretend to know the "ultimate substance and essence of things." To be sure, the philosopher must "reach out for the ultimate" but he must do so ethically rather than ontologically. And this means that the philosopher must reflect upon his own actions and decisions. "Thereby he systematizes his own consciousness, and, inasmuch as his experience has a universal character, his system will be recognized as true" (p.3).

Such a starting point and such a procedure as Kroner here commends would seem to be discouraging enough. Philosophy must deal with the ultimate meaning of life while yet it honestly admits that man cannot know the ultimate nature of reality. Should this perhaps lead philosophy to an acceptance of revelation by God as inherently and basically necessary for the pursuit of philosophy? Not at all. Every philosophical system must expect its own collapse. Yet it must assume its own power to be so great as to be able to exclude from the outset any interpretation of life that involves revelation as basic to human experience.

Starting Point

There is in human experience, says Kroner, an inherent polarity or duality between man's "individuality" and "his world." "From the beginning of self-conscious experience this polarity has made itself felt. It is an *Urphänomen*, a primordial and primary 'datum.' It is the most radical opposition we can think of" (p.3). "As long as self-understanding is the core of philosophic thought, the duality of world and self cannot be abandoned, nor can it be derived from any higher unity, be it the world or the self" (p.4). Only if we reject all speculative reductions of this duality between man and the world can we make room for "faith in the living God, the Creator of heaven and earth" (p.4).

"What" says the reader, "have you not just before asserted that Kroner's starting point excludes the idea of revelation? And do you now quote him as on purpose seeking to avoid all speculative metaphysics for the very purpose of making room for this same revelation?"

The answer is that it is not the historic Christian idea of revelation, of creation and of God for which Kroner so carefully reserves a seat. It is the modern, Kantian or critical idea of revelation that he recognizes as legitimately claiming a place for itself. The former had to be excluded because it would have involved from the outset the idea that human experience cannot be self-explanatory in any field. The latter involves nothing but the admission that though human experience is self-explanatory, it does not *exhaustively* know the nature of ultimate reality.

The basic difficulty of this method of exclusion of the Christian idea of revelation and of the inclusion of the critical idea of revelation is that it virtually ascribes to man both total inability to know anything and total ability to know everything. Kroner's method involves on the one hand the assumption that man knows nothing about the ultimate nature of reality; hence revelation is necessary. But Kroner's method involves on the other hand the assumption that man knows all about ultimate reality; he knows that revelation (in the Christian sense of the term) does not exist because God cannot exist.

It is not the formal contradiction involved in Kroner's position—at the same time affirming and denying the fact of revelation—with which we are primarily concerned. It is the self-strangling infant prodigy portrayed to us that evokes our pity. Here is the beginning of human experience. It is, on Kroner's basis, like an infant without parents; the creation idea is not used in explanation of the origin of human self-consciousness. To bring in the idea of creation by the self-conscious triune God of Christianity in explanation of the origin of man's self-consciousness would, according to Kroner, involve illegitimate speculation, a presumptuous assumption of knowing ultimate reality.

Human experience is assumed to be originating "somehow" from the void. "Each of us knows himself at least to the point of being able to say 'I'; but 'the world' is a very vague and indefinite term as long as the philosopher does not try to make its meaning definite" (p.3). But how would man, originating from the void be able to say "I" with any intelligent meaning? Kroner's "I" starts his experience in a void or vacuum. Modern critical philosophy has nowise been able to overcome the fatal isolation of the human ego which it itself has signalized in its first modern master, Descartes. How can human experience take its first breath of rationality on such a basis? How will it be able to distinguish between "I" and "thou" and "the world" in the darkness of ultimate irrationality where never light has dawned?

Speculative and Critical Systems

Yet Kroner's infant human experience "somehow" begins to breathe. But in breathing it at once chokes itself. To know itself the "I" of critical philosophy, "precisely because it does not arrogate to itself the right and power of dictating ultimate truth," is said to be "equipped with the best means of arbitrating the contest of rival metaphysical fighters" (p.5). It is by "giving up all speculative ambitions" that a critical philosophy is supposed to gain insight "into the legitimate capacities of the human mind and its inevitable limitations" (p. 5). But for Kroner the idea of "giving up all speculative ambitions" is identical with the idea of human experience originating and operating in a vacuum. Yet the "I" of such an utter irrationalism is called upon to arbitrate between "rival metaphysical fighters," between various speculative systems, systems that claim to know the nature of ultimate being. How can it do so without itself pretending to know ultimate being? While arbitrating *between* rival metaphysics this judge, denying for himself any knowledge of ultimate being, will naturally decide that *no one* knows anything about ultimate being. Then he is not judging *between* systems. In so doing the "I," so modest to begin with, now identifies itself with Omniscience and Omnipotence. When the individual speaks it is, alas, no longer the individual that speaks. It is now man making himself like God, identifying himself with God, who kills himself as man. The infant, scarcely able or wholly unable to breathe in the vacuum, now appears as a giant strangling the infant which is still itself in the giant.

Thus, as a result, no "speculative system" such as that of Fichte or Hegel, has really been condemned as speculative. Only the Christian "system" is rejected as being speculative. Yet the Christian "system" is the only "system" that is not "speculative." It is based on the idea that man's entire being as well as his whole environment are revelational.

To be sure, Kroner rejects such systems as are offered by Hegel as being speculative. But his own supposedly non-speculative or critical system is no less speculative than that of Hegel. Their common starting point of human experience as self-explanatory is "speculative" through and through. Involved in this starting point is the uncritical assumption of man's autonomy or ultimacy. This idea of man's ultimacy is the idea that man knows that God has not created him, and has not at the beginning of history spoken to him. This is "rationalism" or "speculation." And this speculation mars modern critical philosophy no less than it does the professed system-builders.

The difference between "speculative" philosophy rejected by Kroner and the "critical" philosophy employed by Kroner and others is first that the latter makes many disclaimers while the former does not. "Critical" philosophy never wearies of disclaiming comprehensive knowledge. This disclaimer is most ingratiating and disarming. Modern scientists have learned it from the critical philosophers. They speak of the "mysterious universe" and modestly assert that science has "no pronouncement to make." The unwary Christian says: "Does this not at least make 'revelation possible'? Does this not 'make room for faith'?"

"Yes," answers the critical philosopher "my philosophy does make room for faith, 'if there is a supreme mystery which can be revealed only by the prophetic spirit; if God is not primarily an object to be known, but the head of the community of those who believe in Him; then not metaphysics but sacred theology alone, expounding and explaining the word of God, can deal with the ultimate problem in a logical fashion" (p.4).

Such pronouncements are calculated to reassure believers in historic Christianity greatly. They come from a truly great mind; they are no doubt seriously meant.

For all that, however, the believer in historic Christianity cannot afford to blind himself to the fact that though the modern religious philosopher beckons him in this friendly sincere fashion to join in a common effort—philosophico-religious in nature—at interpreting life, he will soon be asked to give up both Christianity and culture. He will be asked to give up, in particular, the idea of Christian culture. He will be asked to accept a culture in terms of self-explanatory experience; and when he has accepted this he will be given back his God reduced to a god, and himself as knowing nothing and yet knowing all.

(To be continued)

The Balance of the Reformed Ministry*

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The Minister in His Congregation

LET us now consider one or two of the most conspicuous obstacles rolled into the way of the young minister in the Calvinistic ministry.

1. When as a young minister I took charge of my first congregation, I started in with all my God-given zeal and knowledge. I came from a re-awakening and self-reforming church in Hungary; the members of the congregation emigrated from an "enlightenment" and "liberalism" ravished church in Hungary. Some clash of ideas was inevitable. For introducing such things as the recital of the Apostle's Creed, the saying in unison of the Lord's Prayer, the reading of the Scriptures, the collecting and dedicating of the offerings as integral parts of the service, I fell under the suspicion of trying to make them Roman Catholics, changing them into Jehovah Witnesses or some other kind of a sect. The people did not recognize the older and truer traditions of their original mother Church, the Reformed

Church in Hungary, that venerable church of the Calvinistic Reformation. But, young and green as I was, I stood my ground and soon the congregation went through the joys of rediscovering some of the forgotten beauties and hitherto unsuspected depth of its inherited faith.

You, my friends, may also find yourselves in similar situations. You may also come upon congregations which for no sin of theirs will be what they are supposed to be in name only. Do not be dismayed. Stand your ground. The Lord shall bring about your justification.

2. A minister, true and right according to our standards, will surely encounter hardships in his congregation in connection with mixed marriages. I mean marriages of their members with Roman or Greek Catholics, under compliance with the demands of the Church of Rome. These demands culminate in the claiming of all children for that church. It is easy to see that this constitutes a deadly threat to Protestantism as a whole. A full-blooded Protestant minister of whatever hue cannot but oppose it with all his might. But in doing so he is bound to run into heart-rending disappointments in his own people. This is the very point where all their plain and

* This article carries forward a discussion by Dr. Vincze, begun in last month's issue, dealing with the balance which should characterize the Reformed ministry both in its attitude toward the deliverances of the past and in its handling of present problems.