

The Necessity of Absolute Values

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February 1976



Religions and philosophy are, by their very nature, the branches of human knowledge which are predominantly concentrated on value. What value is in itself -- and what it is as related to particular actions, events, and objects are debatable issues. Yet we might readily agree that value is something which leads to attaining a goal, particularly a more important goal for human nature.

Religions and philosophy deal with such a goal and the means to it more specifically than any other sciences. Religions deal with ultimate goals and the means leading to them. Philosophy by its very nature has a similar purpose, but justified by different sources. Religions try to define their positions from the sources of revelation (sacred books, etc.); philosophy, on the basis of natural reason and its own specific insight into the whole of reality. However, looking at the world, with its diversity of religions, enormous at the present time and not less diversified than in the past, we may draw the conclusion that man simply cannot know what position to take with regard to them and, consequently, with regard to values which they proclaim.

A similar position, if not a worse one, might be suggested by philosophy which seems to be so diversified that one finally questions what philosophy is and what its tasks are, and receives contradictory answers. He is even told that the task of philosophy is to philosophize -- not knowing, however, what philosophy is.

Thus, the question easily arises whether or not there is any agreement among intellectuals and peoples at all in both fields. We think that such an agreement exists, particularly in religions, and might exist in philosophy. Thus, values, including absolute ones, are existing, recognizable and objectively supportable.

I. RELIGIONS

When we look at the religions, their variety is extremely striking indeed. The religions of the past and contemporary worlds are so multiple that we do not even know many of their names. Their beliefs and rituals appear so surprising that they provoke varying reactions in individual minds. Some admire them and highly respect them, others reject them with indignation, still others look at them with amusement. Such reactions are not only shared by primitive or less cultured people, but also by highly intellectual leaders of the progressing world. Why the differences of religions and why the differences of attitude among the peoples witnessing them?

I think we can find a quite obvious answer to that. If God really exists and is infinite or not strictly determinable by human reason, as many philosophers hold, then His worshiping by a finite being, which man is, cannot be confined to one form. By the very nature of the recognition and 'acknowledgment of such a Being, the rituals and even the notion of this Being will differ. These differences will reflect the differences between men and between things of the universe which are originated, influenced, or both, by this Being. Such differences are of all kinds of beings on the earth, of planets and stars, of solar systems, not to mention the differences among invisible spirits.

However, the differences cannot be so great as not to contain a certain unity; in the case of religions, we notice a unity of some basic beliefs. This unity we find, I think, in the belief that there exists a transcendent Being influencing this world, before whom man is responsible. This responsibility regards man's life in this world and in the world to come. Besides, man feels that he must somehow worship this God, that is, to acknowledge his human dependence on Him and acknowledge it externally. Hence, all kinds of rituals, cults, and sacrifices have taken place during the whole history of mankind.

Intuitive Conviction

However, for a thinking man, the question persistently arises why such religious events take place. I support the position with many others that man intuitively feels that some Superior Transcendent Being exists. This intuitive conviction permeates all mankind from its beginning through the centuries until our time. This knowledge becomes so deep that men even give up their lives in defense of their religious convictions. I would willingly concur that man's religious conviction flows from his rational instinct as it is called by the great American philosopher, Charles S. Peirce. This conviction may be analyzed and put into rational formulas of discursive or any other kind of reasoning, yet it goes beyond purely theoretical reasoning. This is the reason why all mankind believes. When we speak about atheists, the question arises how many are they and how deeply are they convinced in their minds and hearts about the correctness of their position? We may even ask the question with William James, whoever proved that God does not exist?

We agree that some of these cults are less appealing to observers and non-followers of particular religions. At this point we witness the quite puzzling fact that these religions are followed by highly intellectual individuals. These facts we notice not only in Jewish, Arabic and Christian religions, but also among the believers of Buddhism, Taoism and Shintoism.

Unity in Diversity

Thus we find in religions a certain unity in diversity, namely recognition of the super-mundane or transcendent Being, acknowledgment of responsibility before Him, and a need for some kind of ceremonial worship.

All religions support certain values. This is the basis for their existence. These values, are dictated by man's natural conscience or moral feeling and formulated by the teachings of particular religions with the addition of some positive precepts. Here we notice that the general rules of moral practices are rather common, but their applications differ. As the result, we are compelled to support the opinion that there exists some unity in the diversity of moral values; this is a reflection of a unity in the diversity of religions.

However, the question arises with regard to specific crises in contemporary religions, more specifically speaking within the Roman Catholic Church. This question is extremely relevant because this Church has been quite intransigent in defending the uniqueness of the truth which it advocates. Its unshakable position in doctrine and discipline has been well symbolized in the monument of St. Peter's Basilica, in the papacies of Innocent III, Pius IX, Pius XI and XII, in the First Councils of the Christian Church, of Trent and Vatican I. Suddenly this Church under the direction of John XXIII, and then Paul VI seems to lose its rigidity, inflexibility and gives up to the position of other Christian Churches or even simply to other religions.

Protestantism with its individualism in the interpretation of the sources of revelation (the Bible) and with its free rationalization of Christianity and religion as a whole has been giving up rigidity of belief, teaching and discipline for a long time. But for the Catholic Church this is rather a novelty; and since the position of this Church has been quite prominent, the change might justly be called a crisis of Christianity and to a certain extent of religions altogether. This reverse occurs in the time when Judaism experiences its revival due to its victorious Six Day War; militant atheism has been spreading through the world organized and apparently unified better than ever; the progress of science has reached astonishing achievement; and the world has become politically organized in big blocks of solidifying unity and greater power.

The Catholic Crisis

On such a world-scene the question of true value professed so intrepidly by the Catholic Church becomes very acute. We insistently therefore ask the paramount question about the meaning of the crisis in this Church. It seems, however, that this crisis has more restricted dimensions than at first appears. Maybe even this crisis can be rather called a vitality of the Church which adopts itself to the circumstances of man's life and not a giving up of essentials. True, some theologians seem to give up everything; they venture a convergence of all religions into one universal religion; the dogmas seem to be as changeable as any philosophical tenets. We hear about the secular world, when believers will be limited to small islands in the ocean of atheism.

However, according to the principles of Catholic theology as a science the position of these theologians, regardless of how vocal they are, is not the official position of the Catholic Church. The official position of this Church is always connected with the official statements of the Pope as the head of the visible

church; his less official statements have value too, since they participate in his supreme authority, yet this value has to be more carefully scrutinized. In these teachings of the Popes and the documents signed by them (Vatican II included) we do not find anything contrary to the previous dogmas or basic principles solemnly proclaimed by this Church.

This fact is of paramount importance for a search of absolute values, since it shows that these values are not essentially changed in the basic position of the Catholic Church. Thus these values are still defended and maintained in spite of the appearances which may be misleading. We can go even further by stating that these values are well if not providentially adopted to the circumstances of the times. In this time of political blocks, and the increasing tendency to consider man a citizen of the earth rather than the citizen of small national groups it is highly appropriate that the Church points out what unites it with other churches and religions rather than what separates it.

Preserve Fundamental Values It is of the greatest importance that the theistic positions unite over against the atheistic, and not quarrel among themselves about secondary differences but emphasize what is held in common. This trend seems to be prevalent at the present time, and it should be respected as highly providential. In this way only, it seems that the absolute fundamental values can be preserved.

It seems that this is precisely the spirit in which Christianity and religion are evolving today. Common principles are and must be supported; specific positions have to be discussed in the spirit of mutual love and understanding in order to help remove the differences if it is possible; if not possible then to maintain them with the maxim, *qui potest capere, capiat* (who can understand, let him do so).

II. PHILOSOPHY

However, if there is any unity among religions and their support for certain values, this unity seems to be seriously undermined by philosophy. Philosophers are vastly diversified among themselves in their views on anything not less than religions. The danger of philosophy for religion lies in the fact that philosophy, by its very nature, regardless of the position of individual philosophers in this matter, proposes to pass judgment on the rationale of everything and especially on the things which are most important to the *raison d'être* of man, which is, first of all, man's knowledge of the ultimate reality.

The importance of such a knowledge becomes progressively undermined in the minds of Western philosophers and, consequently, of others. Disagreement concerning the nature of reality led philosophers to question man's capability of knowing. Universal skepticism evidenced already in ancient Pyrrhonism was transformed into the academic skepticism of Hume and his followers. This subtle and scholarly attitude puts in doubt our knowledge of the external world, even the permanency of one's existence. Perceptions become recognized as substances themselves. Consciousness is interpreted as a flux (or wave) of facts without any underlying support of the same nature.

This intricate, speculative reasoning, which puts in doubt the validity of the reasoning and the deepest conviction of any average thinker, received its tremendous reinforcement in the epoch-making philosophy of Kant. Here, in spite of his intention, every philosophical effort seems to lead to skepticism in the last result, or to a sort of irrationalism in the pursuit of consistent reasoning, for the existence of the external world put into question by speculative reason, and accepted as a postulate of practical reason in Kant's philosophical investigations, can be reduced to the condition of speculative reason since practical action is reducible to theoretical awareness of the goal of our activities or of our desire of happiness.

Denial of the Transcendent Through his reasoning, rightly or wrongly interpreted, the door has been opened to the denial of the ultimate, transcendent reality. Hegel builds the system of a new understanding of the reality where men become reduced to a moment of the manifestation of the Absolute, which forms the ultimate reality of everything and is confined to everything. Nietzsche, with his theory of the "dead God," pretends to see man as the lawgiver and thus he turns over all the values. Marxism reduces all the values to matter and its effects; thus it enhances relativity and the abuses of the powerful in the last result.

In the light of these philosophical results, we might ask the question: Is philosophy indeed leading men to a complete disagreement and thus, not permitting him to reach any common or certain value?

This question we can answer by distinguishing two kinds of philosophies. One is professional philosophy, presented by theoreticians of this sublime and paramount science; the other is the philosophy of an every-man. Do these philosophies differ? I think they differ in their theoretical formulation but not in their objective approach to reality.

Theoretically they differ; we have just indicated the difference. Yet, we might ask why they differ. Here we have two problems: one, why philosophers differ among themselves; second, what is their relationship to the every-man philosophy.

Why do professional philosophers differ among themselves? There might be several reasons for that. One of them is the presuppositions in their philosophizing. None of the philosophers wants to admit that his philosophy is based on certain presuppositions. Yet, there is a serious question whether philosophy exists without presupposition. One can suspect that such is only a contention of philosophers but not the fact. With presuppositions are connected specific intentions in their philosophizing.

Lack of Consistency

These intentions, as well as presuppositions, are very often hidden. They can be discovered only by a serious analysis of the life of the philosophers; sometimes by the content of their philosophy itself. Quite often we find a lack of consistency in a philosopher's system. Those inconsistencies become apparent only when the whole system is taken into account, and not just a part of it.

Another reason for the differences among the philosophers is the different segments of reality which they investigate. None of the philosophers investigates the whole of reality, although they draw conclusions to the whole of reality. And here, precisely, may be found the source of serious discrepancy. The investigation of all the reasons for the differences among the philosophers as well as the degree of them calls for a separate science, namely meta-philosophy, or philosophy of philosophies, which will be using as the subject matter of its investigation particular philosophies and their backgrounds, investigating them under the aspect of unity in diversity. Such a science, which presents quite a difficult task for a researcher, will show the true differences among philosophers, how deep they are, and what the reasons are for supporting them.

What is the relationship of professional philosophy to every-man philosophy? It seems that professional philosophy revolves around everyman philosophy. If the professional philosopher becomes too speculative and alienated from the thinking of the every-man philosophy, sooner or later he comes back to this kind of thinking and action. This happens to every philosopher.

Such an attitude indicates that the criterion for a sound philosophy is precisely this every-man philosophy. Professional philosophy cannot ignore the deepest conviction of the daily philosopher. If it does, it becomes a philosophy for logical gymnastics, sometimes a beautiful palace of logical elaboration, or a fantasy of imaginative thinking which, in the last result, is put on the shelves of the library ignored by the stream and impetus of the every-day life.

Every Man a Philosopher

But, one might ask the question, is an average man a philosopher? The answer is that every man is a philosopher since every man is looking for the reason of his actions and this is precisely the essence of philosophy. Every man, philosophers included, has to act now and know what to do and why. This is also the simple formulation of the meaning of philosophical thinking and belief; it is at the same time its deepest formulation. The average man grasps reality intuitively and acts guided by his rational instinct. On this action the whole activity of the whole mankind is based: individual, social, economical, political, religious. This average man in a simple, not forced way, grasps by his reason the reality surrounding him and conforms his action to it.

The real value of philosophy, consequently, lies in such a grasping of reality. This grasping can be theoretically justified, further developed, put into understandable formulas, but cannot be disregarded or distorted. If a philosopher does it, his philosophy becomes a philosophy of the shelves, or a philosophy of unrealistic speculation, or even a fantasy alienated from life. Such also is a philosophy which precludes itself from embracing the broader reality and confining itself to its narrow segment. Such a philosophy cannot satisfactorily answer questions which man, by his very nature, asks all the time.

The daily man philosopher recognizes the ultimate reality and acts accordingly. On his convictions rest religions and the values which mankind as a whole, composed of daily man philosophers, upholds.

Absolute Values

We can summarize by saying that an average man instinctively or, better, by rational instinct, as Peirce would say, grasps absolute values, which ultimately reside in the existing Divinity and man's responsibility before Him. Thus, man feels compelled to act accordingly in various circumstances of his life in order to be happy here and hereafter.

This experience of an average man forms naturally a foundation for religions and justifies their existence. Philosophies, if they fail to grasp this attitude in a correct and convincing way, become shelved in the libraries or else, like Marxism, may try to force their convictions on people. But the shelving of philosophy reduces it to a pure theory or speculation, not helping people in their search for a meaning of life. The exercising of force is momentary, even if it lasts some centuries, as has been the case with the persecution of various religions, more precisely of Christianity in its first centuries of existence. All mankind, however, and its intuitive knowledge for the existence of the absolute values persists forever, even under persecution.