

Theology I: Being of God

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Review of Lectures in Theology I

The study of theology centers about the problem of the Being of God. In the attempt to reach a satisfactory conclusion of the problem, we turn first to the solution offered by [the] materialist, who holds that the apparent dualism of mind and matter is in fact a monism of matter. Mental activities are simply products of matter. We find, in the solution as presented by the materialist, rather doubtful arguments, and finally, as is seen in Haeckel an admission of failure in solving the ??? problem.²

But in addition to these weaknesses in the system, we find that it does not cover all the facts of life. There is no place in the materialistic philosophy for ideals. "All mental activities are the product of experience," says the materialist. But ideals transcend experience. Analysis of ideals indicate clearly that they rest upon the fact of a demand for unity in our natures. This demand for unity is seen by an analysis of our conception [of] truth, goodness and beauty, e.g., our conception of a beautiful object is found to consist in a demand for an organic relation of the parts to the whole. Each part contributes its element to the whole. Because we do not find provision for all the facts and values³ of life, we turn from the materialistic solution, as being inadequate, and seek [a] solution in another direction, viz., the system of postulates. This system is used not because it will lead to an absolute proof, but because, upon the basis of the postulate, a rational

¹ This is from a collection of manuscripts—mostly class papers—written while Davis was a student at Harvard Divinity School, 1902-1904. This manuscript is clearly for the Theology I class he took during the 1902-03 academic year.

² Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) German zoologist, naturalist and philosopher.

³ The professor added "and values" in the margin here.

and acceptable conclusion is reached, which is inclusive and comprehensive.

1st Postulate of Thought = truth.

The first question that arises in our minds is, "Is thought real?" We find two answers. It is real in the sense that "I think." But when we recall that thought is mainly concerned with interpreting external phenomena which [are] presented to us through the senses, the question is suggested, "Is there anything outside of ourselves to which thought corresponds?" Is there an outer thought to which the inner corresponds? Unless an assumption is made that there is an outer thought to which the inner corresponds, the value of the power of reasoning, and all that goes with it, rests upon rather unstable grounds. For, if adjustment to environment is the function of mental activities, then the greatest flexibility in thought is demanded. But reasoning limits flexibility in thought. It is subservient to laws of thought. Hence, reasoning retards the adjustment to environment and is a positive burden, unless it is assumed that there is an outer thought to which the inner thought corresponds. Hence our first postulate is that of universal intelligence. A study of Augustine's *Freedom of the Will* and Royce's *Religious Aspect of Philosophy* confirms the postulate.⁴ In each case the argument rests in fact upon the basis of our postulate. While their arguments are not positive proof, they do confirm the postulate. Also, upon the basis of the postulate of universal intelligence, the problems of identity, and of relation become of rational significance, and are a strong confirmation of the validity of the postulate. While such tests do not raise the postulate to the plane of proof, they do confirm its validity, and warrant us in continuing upon the assumption of a universal intelligence.

2nd postulate of goodness.

Activity. With our demand for unity in a world of universal intelligence, we are faced with the problem, "to do" or "not to

⁴ Saint Augustine (of Hippo) (354-430) Theologian and philosopher, Bishop of Hippo in Roman North Africa. He wrote a treatise on Freedom of the Will. Josiah Royce (1855-1916) Harvard philosopher; his book, *The Religious Aspects of Philosophy*, was published in 1885.

do," a life of greatest activity or the least. Between these two we must choose (Browning's ???).⁵ While we may not have the knowledge in full upon which to base a purely intellectual decision, we are warranted in making a decision in faith, in putting ourselves upon the side which we believe offers the largest scope to life (James' "Will to Believe").⁶ In view of the importance of activity in life (Fichte "The Vocation of Man")⁷ the fact that it gives the widest scope to our intelligence, we are justified in making a provisional postulate of activity, which includes our first postulate. We now have a postulate of universal intelligence with an impulse to act.

But activity must be towards an end. It presupposes a purpose. Now we find in ourselves what may be called a social impulse, the tendency to act contrary to the desire of mere individual caprice (Kant).⁸ Hence we postulate the moral ideal, i.e., the existence of moral order in the world. But we have already seen that our universal intelligence is active, and now we add that the activity is in the direction of the moral ideal, or the Kingdom of God. Hence, we postulate an intelligent goodwill. We find our intelligent goodwill postulate is confirmed when, in its light, we seek an explanation of moral law. It explains the relation of social impulse to moral law. Also, it gives a clear significance to conscience, both as to its origin and validity. For conscience is the universal moral order expressing itself in the individual. Again, in light of our postulate, moral idealism is justified. Ideals represent the universal goodwill expressed in individuals. It explains the origin and validity of moral ideals. All these approvals are not proofs, but only confirmations. Our postulate becomes "One comprehensive intelligent goodwill shaping the Kingdom of God."

⁵ Presumably Robert Browning (1812-1889) English poet.

⁶ William James (1842-1910) American psychologist and philosopher, author of "The Will to Believe," *The New World*, Vol. 5, 1896, pp. 327-347. Extensively reprinted.

⁷ Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814) German philosopher. His book, *The Vocation of Man*, was originally published in German in 1799.

⁸ Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) German philosopher.

3rd postulate of feeling = Beauty.

In the realm of feeling we find that we have a sense of beauty in our nature which is delight in the discerned unities of life, a sense of satisfaction in seeing organic unity. Now this sense of beauty is of value beyond our senses because it is matched by the joy of the goodwill in contemplating unity in his own mind. Upon the basis of the postulate, our sense of beauty comes to have worth and dignity. Moments of great artistic insight, spiritual as well as aesthetic, gain greater authority because they are moments when we discern the true unity of the moral ideal.

We have found that if we postulate an intelligent goodwill that we can account for the facts of life, which otherwise have little meaning. No proof has been made, but the postulate has [been] confirmed by the satisfactory use made of it.

III. Confirmation of the Postulate

This same conclusion has been reached by other methods, so-called methods of proof. We now turn to investigate these arguments to determine how far they are proofs and what relation they bear to our postulate. A study of the *a priori* argument as presented by Anselm shows that his argument is not a proof.⁹ To his position that the idea of the highest thinkable proves the existence of the highest thinkable, Kant would reply that mental phenomena are entirely distinct from "things in themselves," and the idea of a thing has nothing to do with its existence.¹⁰ This applies to ideas of God as well as things. Now, Anselm did not raise this question, but relied upon the validity of the mind, or, in other words, he tacitly assumed our postulate. Again, Anselm's highest thinkable is an inclusive whole. It cannot be the idea at end of the series because that final idea plus the preceding ideas of the series would be greater than the final idea, hence, it is an inclusive whole. Also, while Descartes' 1st argument is similar to Anselm's, his last argument turns on the necessity of explaining the existence of ideals in our minds. He

⁹ Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) best known for his "ontological argument" for the existence of God.

¹⁰ The professor put a "?" in the margin here, and on the back side of the paper a comment, "Kant's argument is that existence adds nothing to the idea."

argues towards what must be back of the ideals, a tendency towards a postulate.¹¹ Now our postulate explains the existence of the ideals in the mind and is confirmed by Descartes' argument. The *a priori* arguments do not prove the existence of God, but they confirm our postulate.

Cosmological Argument

In the causal arguments there are three steps. The first is from causes to cause, i.e., back of all phenomena there must be an un-caused cause. In observing the sequence of phenomena, we detect two elements, 1. Force, 2. Event. Following back the line of force we come to an un-caused force, which, so far as it goes, confirms our postulate. Back of the line of events we find a unitary General Phenomenon (???'s Interaction). This confirms the postulate. Nor can we find positive proof in the argument from mind to mind, but it also confirms the postulate. But in interpreting the first cause as will, we are led to interpret the will as strength of personality (not as choice between alternatives ???). Now we found our idea of 1st cause to be unity, and also personality, or unity of force with purpose. This corresponds to our postulate, and is a confirmation, i.e., God is not the conclusion but the presupposition of the causal argument.

Teleological Argument

In the 1st form of this argument from design to designer, we do not find proof. While design points to a designer, it does not prove a first cause (Kant). It proves intelligence, but not infinite intelligence (???).¹² The process of the world has been a progress as seen in our conception of truth, goodness and beauty. We can account for this progress either by chance or by teleology. No logical reasoning can make the decision, but chance seems impossible, while upon the basis of our postulate, teleology seems rational, and the observed facts of life prove to be just what would be expected upon that supposition. The facts strengthen and confirm our postulate.

¹¹ Rene Descartes (1596-1650) French, philosopher, scientist and mathematician. His arguments for the existence of God can be found in his 1641 *Meditations on First Philosophy*.

¹² The professor put a "?" in the margin here.

There is however one serious objection to this, viz., accounting for evil in the world. No satisfactory explanation has thus far been given. Nevertheless, we cannot discard our postulate on the strength of this objection above because we cannot face final judgement upon any process until the facts are all in. In this case, the facts are not all in. Again, the mere fact that the problem arises in our mind is a confirmation of our postulate, for the problem has no meaning except upon the basis of the postulate. So, in spite of the problem of evil, we still hold to the postulate.

Consensus

Having made a postulate of an intelligent goodwill, we have seen it confirmed by all the facts of life, by the historical arguments for the Being of God, and by scientific theories. It makes life rational and real. Our postulate is so strongly confirmed, and adds so much to the significance of life, it has made life so great in the past, that we are justified in accepting [it] as truth that which we have [so] far held to be only a postulate.

Criticism

To be plain spoken, I have no criticism to offer. In idea, mechanism and presentation, the problem of the Being of God has been set forth in a manner which meets the demands of my habit of mind. I do not believe that there is any other satisfactory method except that of the postulate, at least I have failed to find one.

While the mechanism has been satisfactory to me, and I think that I have understood the ??? principle of the course, I think that it might be improved here. Often, I have heard the criticism, "I don't see what he was driving at." I think that the solution lies in the more detailed system of lettering and numbering the divisions and sub-divisions. At times I have been unable to follow just this outline which is rather essential to a clear comprehension of the subject.

[Here a note from the professor:]

Thank you for the suggestion—an effort to state both sides fairly, often results in confusion.

The summary lacks clearness here and there perhaps because of too great condensation.