

Boston Personalism

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Lecture delivered to the faculty of Boston University—School of Theology—
March 6, 1956

I would indeed have been happier if you had invited me to listen to you instead of to speak to you. But, in a sense, I have already listened to you a good deal. I have listened to you by reading the great books of your truly great men.

When I say that I am thinking primarily of Dr. Borden P. Bowne, Dr. Albert Cornelius Knudson and Dr. Edgar Sheffield Brightman. Permit me to tell you what I seem to have heard from them. And then will you not kindly inform me whether I have heard aright. Have I understood the main thrust of the writings of these and other men like Dr. Peter Anthony Bertocci and Dr. L. Harold De Wolff? Kindly correct me where I have failed to do so. And then be good enough, if you please, to answer some questions that remain in my mind. These questions will no doubt reveal my own background and thinking. You may then in turn have some questions you wish to ask me. Only if there is mutual understanding of one another's position can there be a fruitful result of our conversations the one with the other. We may, in the end, not have come to anything like full agreement. That may be too much to expect in view of the brevity of time at our disposal and the difference of background between us. But I would fain imitate the noble example of John Wesley whom we all delight to honor when, writing on Dr. Taylor's "Doctrine of Original Sin" he said:

I desire ...'to speak the truth in love, (the only warmth which the gospel allows)' and to write with calmness, though not indifference.... O that the God of the Christians may be with me! that his Spirit may give me understanding, and enable me to think and 'speak as the oracles of God,' without going from them to the right hand or to the left.¹

Historical Connections

Boston Personalism, as I understand it, is both a theology and a philosophy. As a theology it seeks to bring the message of Methodism in modern garb. As a

¹ *Works*, Vol. 9, p. 195.

philosophy it seeks to supply an interpretation of experience "with which Christian thought most naturally allies itself at the present time."²

Historically Methodism stood for the rights of human experience against the "theological determinism" of John Calvin and his followers. "The whole conception of the supreme worth of man rests upon the assumption of his freedom."³ "Theological determinism affirms the moral life in its full power both in God and man and yet rejects what is commonly regarded as the fundamental presupposition of such a life."⁴ The position of theological determinism is therefore not essentially different from that of naturalistic determinism.⁵

So far then as theological determinism is with us today this message of freedom must continue to be heard in the interest of truth, morality and religion.

1. What Is Personalism?

Modern Methodism

But this message of methodism must be put in modern form to meet the situation in a modern day. This message must therefore first be broadened and deepened. It must be able to meet modern science, modern philosophy and modern theology on its own ground. To do so its method must no longer be that of appeal to scriptural exegesis. We must follow the historical rather than the dogmatic method in our use of Scripture. Doing so it is quite possible to admit that the Bible contains much that verbally favors theological determinism. But there is also much that favors the idea of freedom. And there is no longer any need to harmonize these views any individual writer and still less to think of the Bible as a whole as presenting one point of view. We read the Bible for the high moral and spiritual insights of many of its writers. But if we speak of it as our authority in religion or morality we mean that its writers were experts in their field. Our position is therefore not dogmatic and authoritarian; it is critical and experiential.

Modern Doctrine

² Albert C. Knudson, *Philosophy of Personalism*, p. 250.

³ Albert C. Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, p. 160.

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 155.

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 156, Cf. also Bowne, *The Christian Revelation*.

With this modern use of the Bible goes, quite naturally, a modern view of the teachings about God and his relation to man and the world.

1. There is first the stress on the immanence of God. This doctrine of immanence "contains the solution of many traditional difficulties."¹ It does away alike with bald naturalism and bald supernaturalism—"a thing of portents, prodigies and interpositions, spooking about among the laws of nature, but having no vital connection with the orderly movement of the world."² "A divine purpose, a moral development in humanity, is the essential meaning of God in history."³ "Then we come to a natural which roots in the super-natural, and a supernatural whose methods are natural; and to this neither science nor religion has any objection."⁴

2. Consonant with this idea of the immanence of God is that of man as a rational and moral being. The nature of man as thus viewed is not inconsistent with the idea that man lives under certain limitations. In fact, there must be certain limitations if freedom is to be rational freedom. "The concrete freedom for which the indeterminist contends and which he finds in actual life is not of the arbitrary and lawless type. It is not the will, viewed as a detached faculty, that is free, but the whole man. And man taken as a whole is a rational being moved by various impulses. He has a character, a rational nature, an environment, all of which influence his conduct. These factors do not absolutely determine what he will do but they do limit his freedom. They form as it were the framework and raw material of his being within which and through which he works. Apart from them the will would have no content, it would be vacuous; and freedom would be meaningless. All that the free will can do is to give direction to the native elements of one's being. Indeed, that is what freedom is. It means self-direction and self-determination and as such it presupposes a more or less fixed nature with whose direction and control it is concerned and by which it is in turn limited."⁵ "Our conduct is far more dependent on the hidden forces of our own being and of the surrounding world than most of us realize; and so intimate and subtle is this dependence that no finite mind is in a position to determine the exact extent of our freedom and responsibility."⁶ But all this is not meant to detract from the conviction that man is an "independent agent," "that he is the

¹ Borden P. Bowne, *The Immanence of God*, p. 3.

² *Idem.*, p. 27.

³ *Idem.*, p. 52.

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 54.

⁵ Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, p. 159.

⁶ *Idem.*, p. 160.

captain of his own soul, the determiner of his own destiny.”⁷ “True indeterminism is ‘relative’ not ‘absolute.’ It does not hold that free action is causeless and motiveless. It looks upon the free agent as himself the cause of his own action and as guided by motives of various kinds drawn from his own nature.”⁸

3. Immediately connected with this notion of rational freedom goes that of evil. “The human will is weak and vacillating. It is limited in numerous ways, and this limitation carries with it a need of redemptive grace quite as real as would the complete absence of the power of self-determination. We have ideals that impose themselves upon us as duties and yet it is impossible for us fully to realize them. We may say that we can because we ought, but we nevertheless can not. Our ideals ever recede before us. In their light we stand condemned, and the only way that the condemnation can be removed is through the divine grace.”⁹ “There is, to be sure, in our religious feeling a sharp distinction between the human and the divine. We think of God as the source of all that is good, and by way of contrast, think of ourselves as morally impotent and devoid of all merit. But this distinction is one of feeling and should not be translated into a metaphysical antithesis. Man, like God, is free and because he is free he seeks the ideal.

But the ideal transcends his power of realization and hence in his helplessness he turns to God for aid.”¹⁰

4. The Incarnation—Again, consonant with the views of creation, sin and grace, and indeed as part of it, is the idea of incarnation. Jesus stands “out as unique among the religious founders of the world.” “His personality is part and parcel of the church’s faith. To believe in God is for the Christian to believe in Christ; and to believe in Christ is to believe in God.”¹¹ And when we think of Christ we think at once of his incarnation. But in thinking of the incarnation we think back at once also to the doctrine of the immanence of God in man. With this doctrine in mind it appears that the doctrine of the Chalcedon creed separated too sharply between the divine and the human natures of Christ. “For one thing the formula of ‘two natures in one person’ assumed a more radical disparity between the human and the divine than is really consistent with either the modern idea of the divine immanence or the Christian doctrine of the divine incarnation. If God is truly immanent or incarnate in man, it would seem that

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 124.

⁹ *Idem.*, p. 165.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 167.

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 283.

there must be some other way of conceiving their relation to each other than that of the coexistence of two parallel but heterogeneous natures in one person. There must, it would seem, be a kinship between the human and the divine that would permit us to think of the divine as manifesting itself in and through the human and the human at its highest and best as embracing the divine.”¹²

To escape the “insoluble dualism” of the creed we must therefore “take our start, not from the second Person of the Trinity, but from the facts of Jesus own life and from the facts of our own experience.”¹³ Our approach to the problem of the person of Jesus must be “more historical, more empirical, more anthropocentric and more personalistic.”¹⁴ As the result of such an approach to the problem of Jesus we must conclude: (a) “that his personal center, his ego, was human.” (b) that the uniqueness of Jesus was due to “his unique dependence upon the divine will and to his unique enduement with the Divine Spirit” and (c) that divinity was ascribed to Jesus “not because he made this claim for himself, nor because he was possessed of omniscience and omnipotence, but because of his unique consciousness of oneness with God and because of his creative and redemptive agency in the founding of the kingdom of God.”¹⁵

Knudson speaks of this modern view of Christ as the consciousness or dependence theory. “It differs,” he says, “from the two nature doctrine in that it is more strictly theistic and personalistic. It recognizes, as the other doctrine does not, the ultimate and underivable character of personal unity and also the distinct individuality of both God and man.”¹⁶ And he adds “From the very nature of this Christological theory it follows that the doctrines of the Virgin Birth and the bodily resurrection of Jesus are not essential to it. The relation of Jesus to God, as conceived in the theory, is quite independent of the method of his advent into the world.”¹⁷

“The type of Christology here outlined,” he continues, “interprets the incarnation in terms of immanence and inspiration.”¹⁸

5. Redemption.

Idem., p. 299.

¹³ *Idem.*, p. 304.

¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 318.

¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 319.

¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 324.

¹⁷ *Idem.*, p. 325.

¹⁸ *Idem.*, p. 331.

The message of redemption that is consonant with this view of the person of Christ is naturally also set forth in modern terms. Knudson speaks of the ransom theory, the satisfaction theory and the penal theories of atonement and says: "But according to none of these theories does God stand in the direct and free relation to men implied in ethical personalism."¹⁹ And again, "Merit and guilt are inalienable from personality. They cannot be detached from one person and transferred to another. Nor can one person properly be punished in place of another. The whole idea of ethical substitution is radically false."²⁰

Knudson would replace these theories with a moral or personal theory. "The moral or personal theory differs from the theories we have been considering in that it is directed manward."²¹ "It assumes that God in his essential nature is love and that there never was anything in him that stood in the way of man's redemption. The only real barrier to human salvation has always lain in man himself, and the barrier has been one that could be removed only by spiritual means. No ransom, no appeasement of the divine anger, no satisfaction of the divine justice, no vicarious punishment, no penal example was ever necessary to open the way to man's forgiveness."²² All that is said "about a ransom, about satisfaction, about vicarious punishment, about propitiation, about substitution, about a penal example, must be interpreted figuratively."²³ "The highest conception of God is that of Father; and this relation to men is incommensurable."²⁴

"What Christ did in his supreme act of self-sacrifice, that God did."²⁵

6. Implications of the Atonement.

What are the implications of the atonement when thus understood in personalistic terms? When the work of redemption is interpreted so as to be consistent with "an immanental philosophy and in a way that will also conserve its uniqueness,"²⁶ then the following points must be observed:

¹⁹ *Idem.*, p. 367.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Idem.*, p. 369.

²² *Idem.*, p. 370.

Idem., p. 375.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Idem.*, p. 377.

²⁶ *Idem.*, p. 379.

(a) The idea of mediation does not presuppose metaphysical dualism. "We derive everything from others, and so it is possible that there may be one supreme source of illumination and inspiration. Such a source we believe Christ to be, and in this sense he is our mediator—His uniqueness is not absolute. It is one of degree, but it is on that account none the less real and significant."²⁷ He is our mediator of revelation.

(b) As our mediator of revelation Christ mediates the eternal love of God to man. God is the most deeply obligated being in the universe. "He has made men and he must, therefore, do everything in his power to save them. If he did not, he would not be a God of love. Love under the conditions of human freedom requires sacrificial service. The principle of atonement is thus planted in the very heart of God."²⁸ Thus as the mediator of revelation Christ is also the mediator of creation. His work has cosmic significance. The end of the world can, to be sure, not be pictured today as it once was. "The catastrophic end of the world and the coming of the Messiah in the clouds of heaven are conceptions that belong to an earlier world-view."²⁹ "The coming of Christ in the clouds has for us a purely symbolic significance."

Thus too, finally, the state of men in the hereafter cannot be taken as clearly revealed in Scripture. "Some passages seem to teach eternal punishment, others apparently favor universal restoration, and still others point to annihilation.

This variety of teaching is itself evidence that the question under consideration is one to which faith has no positive answer."¹ The question is one that must be answered on the basis of experience, our experience of freedom. On that basis we may say, "God does not in the case of the wicked succeed in overcoming the resistance of the human will, and to that extent fails to achieve what must have been his purpose in the creation of every human soul. But that he should accomplish his purpose in every such case would seem to be excluded or at least rendered highly improbable by the fact of freedom. Theoretically, there is, then, no decisive reason for rejecting annihilationism."²

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Idem.*, p. 386.

²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 498.

¹ *Idem.*, p. 504.

² *Idem.*, p. 503.

But faith is not concerned with the fate of the wicked. It is concerned with the destiny of the righteous. And on this point it has no uncertainty. "It affirms in triumphant terms the redemption of all believers from sin and death."³

Background of Philosophy

From this hasty sketch it appears that the theology of Boston Personalism is really an inherent part of the philosophy of Boston Personalism. It may perhaps be said that the philosophy of Personalism is basic to its theology. The experience approach of older methodism has found support in the experience approach of modern philosophy. "Personalism is unequivocally in accord with the faith of the church insofar as the latter insists on the personality of God and on the view that the highest revelation of divine truth is to be found in the person of Christ rather than in his oral teaching. The magic word 'personality,' by virtue of the new insight it gives us into the nature of reality and into the conditions of knowledge, bind together historic Christianity and the personalistic philosophy. But while this is true, it is also true that personalism is a modernist movement. It stands intimately related to the latest and most significant developments of modern speculative thought. It is charged throughout with the spirit of modernity, and as such cannot but be out of harmony with certain aspects of traditional Christianity."⁴

To understand something of what the philosophy of Personalism means by the experience approach we must turn back to Kant. Knudson traces the background of Personalism from the time of Plato down to modern times. Those who have stood for the immateriality of the human as well as the divine soul (Plotinus) are among its progenitors. With his idea of the "unity of the mental life, with his stress on the will in the life of both God and man, with his formulation of the idea of self-certainty and with his clear grasp of the fact that a valid metaphysics must be based on the self-knowledge of the finite personality" Augustine "might in a sense be called the first personalist." But Kant, though not himself a metaphysical personalist, "probably did more to promote the spread of personalism than any other thinker."⁵ Kant sought for the conditions which make human experience intelligible to itself. The dogmatism of the rationalist and the dogmatism of the empiricists alike, he argued, led away from experience. Both Locke and Leibniz required men to go beyond experience and therewith to accept the unintelligible. There was no possibility of explaining the fact of human

³ *Idem.*, p. 504.

⁴ Knudson, *The Philosophy of Personalism*, p. 254.

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 431.

knowledge on the position of either of them. Experience must seek for the principles of its intelligibility within itself. Says Bowne: "Since the time of Kant it has been clear to those who could estimate his work that we can never know anything outside of the thought sphere. Mind and the products of mind comprise the whole sphere of the knowable. This Kant made plain once for all."⁶

To be sure, Kant was not fully consistent with himself. He still retained something of the uncritical realism which it was his basic contribution to philosophy to reject. "In this way arose the continuous contradiction which runs through Kant's exposition. And we escape the contradiction and save the truth of the system only by giving up the extra-mental things altogether, and making the thing world the expression of a thought world behind it or immanent in it; which thought world again is the expression of a supreme intelligence which founds and coordinates both the thing world and the world of finite spirits. In this way things are at once independent of our thought and commensurate with thought."⁷ Or again: "The dualism of our human knowing is founded and transcended in a monism of the infinite, the source of both the finite spirit and the cosmic order."⁸

To this must be added a further thought. "The world is not merely an idea, it is also a deed. The contents of the world are given in the idea, but the world becomes real only as it passes into act. It is not merely a conception in the divine understanding, it is also a form of divine activity. Both factors are needed to express our full conviction with regard to the world."¹

Idealism

In a very general way this affords us a first glance at the philosophy of personalism. Its foundation is found in the idea of personality as inherently intelligible to itself. This enables us to do justice to the motif of realism without falling prey to its fatal weakness of reducing thought and experience of selves to the impersonal laws of things. "When thought becomes critical, it appears that the basal certainties in knowledge are not the ontological existence of material and mechanical things, but rather the existence of persons, the community of intelligence and the system of common experience."² And with the rejection of materialism and mechanism goes the rejection of solipsism. Our experience is

⁶ Bowne, *Theism*, p. 144.

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 145.

⁸ *Ibid.*

¹ *Idem.*, p. 146.

² *Idem.*, p. 127.

inherently a joint experience. "We cannot live intellectually at all without recognizing other persons than ourselves, and without assuming that the laws of intelligence are valid for all alike, and that all have the same general object of experience. Solipsism is absurd to the pitch of insanity."³ "The sense world is flitting, fleeting, discontinuous. Epistemology shows that it is all an inarticulate, phantasmagoric flux or dissolving view until thought brings into it its rational principles, and fixes and interprets it. The sense world, so far as it is articulate, or anything we can talk about, is already a thought world. Its permanences and identities are products of thought."⁴

In all this Bowne deliberately leads us away from realism as an inadequate philosophy. Opposing the idea of discrete plurality he says, "But the mind grasps and fixes the temporal flow by timeless ideas which give the abiding meaning of which the temporal movement is the bearer or expression."⁵ Then he adds: "But we must go still further in the direction of idealism, and point out that space and time themselves are no proper existences apart from the mind, but only forms of experience.... Nothing that really exists in succession can exist at all. Time itself cannot exist. For only the present can exist, and the present is simply the plane of division between past and future. Hence nothing can exist if time be ontological."⁶ Or again, "Metaphysics shows that active intelligence alone fills out the true notion of being, unity, identity, and causality. On the impersonal and mechanical plane these categories all vanish or contradict themselves."⁷ But human intelligence by itself is not sufficient. "When we conceive the world in its causality, we are brought down to active intelligence by which it exists and from which it ever proceeds. The world has its form and meaning in the divine thought, and its reality in the divine will."⁸ "The world of sense qualities may exist apart from the sensibility of A or B but it cannot exist apart from all sensibility."⁹ "Thus the arguments from induction and from epistemology and metaphysics agree in enforcing the claim of theism."¹

³ *Idem.*, p. 128.

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 131, Cf. p. 132 for a summation.

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 137.

⁶ *Idem.*, p. 139.

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 140.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 141.

⁹ *Idem.*, p. 143.

¹ *Idem.*, p. 148.

But Not Absolute Idealism

But theism is no absolute idealism. Finite personality must not be swallowed up in the Absolute. Quite independent of the further question whether God himself must be thought of as finite or absolute personalists agree with the movement of thought represented by such names as Andrew Seth Pringle Pattison and James Ward as over against the movement in thought represented by such names as F. H. Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet. Seth and Ward, with others, feared lest in the strong Hegelianism of their day the human person would be reduced to a focus in the life of the Absolute. In the famous debate before the Aristotelian Society on the subject whether the individual has substantive or adjectival existence Seth defended the view he had already formerly expressed in the idea of the "imperviousness" of the individual.

In a general way Boston Personalism is as careful to set off its position from the idea of an all encompassing Absolute as it is to set off its position from mechanism and materialism or solipsism. It would avoid impersonalism in both directions. Brightman gives expression to this general idea in an essay contributed to a volume dedicated to Radakrishnan.

"Occidental pluralistic personalists and Oriental monists would agree about the physical world of nature; it is wholly in God, his work or—as Hindus would say—his play, *Lila*. The difference would come in the assertion of the plurality of persons. This plurality is asserted for two special reasons; first, it seems incoherent to include in a good and wise God all the error, ignorance, and moral evil that we find in human selves; and second, because social relations and especially the relations of love and cooperation between person and person, lose their meaning when personal distinctions are denied and all persons melt into one. The personalistic view embodies the respect for individual personality which one finds in the Kantian ethics and democratic practice, as well as in bhakti."² We need God but we must not have "too much of God."³ It is plain that the general movement of thought away from the merely human and petty toward the complete and universal is a rational necessity. But it is equally plain that this movement has its limits. Any idea, to remain an ideal at all, must be definite. If you expand an idea beyond all meaning, it has indeed blown up; it has suddenly turned into nothing at all, like pure being in the first triad of Hegel's logic."⁴

² Radakrishnan, p. 294.

³ Brightman, *The Problem of God*, p. 84.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The problem would here seem to be similar to that which confronted Aristotle. The unity which he offered as an explanation of the plurality of the temporal world turned out to be a specific rather than a numerical unity, and abstract principle rather than a personal being. Does thought really require such an abstract universal? If it does, are the demands of thought then completely at variance with the demands of the heart which seeks for communion with a personal God? And does not our starting-point in human experience require us, with Kant's practical reason, to do justice to our moral and religious nature as well as to our intellectual nature?

Apparently with this situation in mind Brightman turns to a consideration of *The Contraction of God*. If, over against naturalism we continue to expand the idea of God we finally reach the point wherein this idea includes good and evil, true and false, conscious and unconscious. "Nevertheless, the tendency toward this expansion is based on real evidence, the evidence of scientific observation, religious experience, and philosophical thought."⁵

Fortunately we can point to the fact that everywhere in experience a law of expansion requires as its opposite a law of contraction. "It is very well to tell a young lady that she is beautiful and graceful, and to add that she is wise and accomplished; but if you go further and declare that she is awkward and two hundred and fifty pounds in weight, you have destroyed the meaning of the idea with which you started. All scientific concepts are subject to this same principle."⁶ "When the idea of God was enlarged from that of protector of the Hebrew people to that of Father of all mankind, the change was a definite improvement morally and metaphysically, both because of its greater consistency with the facts of universal human experience and also because of its being an idea at least as clear as and far more intelligible than the one from which thought started. But there are many persons today who feel that any conception of God as a person is too narrow. They wish to speak of God in broader terms, and so, with Matthew Arnold, they no longer think of him as a personal Father, but merely as 'the power not ourselves that makes for righteousness.' The word 'power' is intended to mark a step forward in thought beyond the idea of personality. As a matter of fact, it is an expansion into fog, a verbal smoke-screen to cover our unwillingness to think definitely. Power is an abstraction; personality is concrete conscious experience. Power is always the power of some being which exercises it; personality is the only kind of being known to us that could exercise power of a

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 87.

⁶ *Idem.*, p. 89.

righteous kind. Hence the transition from personality to power is an expansion from definite meaning to indefinite vagueness."⁷

From this point on Brightman leads us straight to his notion of God as finite, as confronted with the Given in his very being. But for the moment let us return to Bowne. At this point it is imperative to avoid the difference between personalists with respect to this question of finitistic theism. It is what they appear to have in common that now most concerns us. It is their common opposition to absolute idealism that at the moment occupies our minds. This opposition is made in the interest of morality and religion. But it is of importance to see that it is also made in the interest of the demands of thought. And this point is brought out very clearly in Bowne's admirable work on *Theory of Thought and Knowledge*. Absolute idealism would identify the world of things with the contents of an assumed absolute thought.⁸ In criticism of this position he says: "Grant that there is a universal reason whose contents are reality, and whose contents are united by rational necessity into an organic whole, the problem of human knowing still remains untouched, unless we show that the objective reason must specialize itself not only into the world of things, but also into the movements of human thought. Supposing, then, that this universal reason means anything, before we can use it we must learn how this universal thought is related to our thinking, and how it secures the validity of our individual conceptions. Some provision must be made for our sharing in this thought, if it is to help us in our theorizing. Unfortunately, this provision has not been made."⁹

In addition to the difficulty of explaining the relation of absolute to finite reason there is the difficulty of explaining the relation of absolute reason to contingent fact.

"Reason as a system of principles is only a formal outline of possibility, and contains nothing specific and actual. The actual is found, not deduced; it is a fact of experience, not an implication of reason."¹⁰ No reflection upon the eternal truths of reason or the general cosmic laws would deduce a boulder or any other concrete fact. These have to be admitted as opaque facts, so far as reason is concerned; and if we have an explanation it can be found only in the notion of purpose. The cosmic laws could serve other ends as well as the actual, and for the actual we must have recourse to the idea of plan. Necessary truths, general laws,

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 90.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 305.

⁹ *Idem.*, p. 306.

¹⁰ *Idem.*, p. 307.

and specific facts bound up in an all-embracing plan are the elements which our understanding of the system demands.

For us, the system so far from being a necessity of reason, abounds in contingent facts.¹¹

In this connection Bowne speaks of a "certain ambiguity of reason." "Reason may mean the system of necessary truth involved in the nature of the intellect; and it may be extended to cover design, purpose, fitness, and character. In the latter sense, existence may be rational, or an implication of the highest reason, without being such in the former sense. But the implications for reason in the latter sense are not self-realizing necessities of logic, but imply foresight and will for their realization. It is only in the first sense mentioned that the claim has significance here; and in this sense the claim cannot be allowed without immediate speculative shipwreck. For as the logical implications of a thing coexist with the thing, if the universe as existing were a logical implication of the pure reason it and all its contents would be external. There would be no room for change, but all things would rigidly coexist.

In this view, also, finite minds with all their contents would be necessary and eternal; and as error and evil are a manifest part of these contents, it follows that they are likewise necessary and eternal. Hence we should have to assume an element of unreason and evil in reason itself, and by this time the collapse of the system would be complete."¹²

The precise objection to absolute idealism must be carefully noted. According to Bowne absolute idealism does not distinguish clearly between divine and human thought. As over against "traditional philosophers" the idealists are right in holding that, "we must at last come down to a thinker whose thoughts are things.

That is, to a thinker whose objects are only his realized thoughts." If we should posit over against this thinker an independent and eternal cosmic existence as the object of his thought, we should fall into a hopeless metaphysical dualism.¹³ On the other hand the absolute idealists are mistaken in that they overlook the necessary dualism between finite thought and thing in the interest of an ultimate monism. "The relation of our thought to cosmic being involves, then, a dualism

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 308.

¹² *Idem.*

¹³ *Idem.*, p. 310.

and a parallelism. A dualism, for our thought, though able to grasp objects only through conceptions, is not able to view its conceptions as real, but only as valid for reality. It likewise involves a parallelism, as otherwise thought would not grasp reality.”¹⁴ The dualism of the finite must be “both founded and transcended in a monism of the infinite.”¹⁵ The finite and the infinite must never be identified. “Their mutual otherness is necessary if we are to escape the destruction of all thought and life.”¹⁶

We have now brought in view some of the main points of Boston Personalism, first as to its theology and second as to its philosophy. Something of its starting-point, its method and its conclusion have come into view. As to philosophy our main concern so far has been with Bowne. Says Knudson, “It is to Borden P. Bowne that we owe what may be called systematic methodological personalism. It was he who first took the personalistic conception of reality, grounded it in the Kantian epistemology, developed its implications in a comprehensive way, and made it the center and constitutive principle of a complete metaphysical system. This principle he formulated in the statement that the categories of thought do not explain intelligence but are explained by it.” For this reason Bowne said of himself that he was “personalist, the first of the clan in any thorough-going sense.”¹⁷

Knudson also speaks of Bowne’s personalism as being typical personalism, “What I have called typical personalism is neither pluralistic nor absolutistic, or, rather, it is both. It recognizes a permanent truth in both pluralism and absolutism, and so seeks to keep the scales evenly balanced between them. But the most distinctive form of personalism is not reached until personalism becomes a philosophical method as well as a body of conclusions. It is this that Bowne has given us, a systematic methodological personalism, in which the whole principle of metaphysics is organized around one central and all-illuminating principle—that of the self-sufficiency of personality.

In the light of these facts we may define personalism as that form of idealism which gives equal recognition to both the pluralistic and monistic aspects of experience and which finds in the conscious unity, identity, and free activity of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 311.

¹⁶ Bowne, *Theism*, p. 284.

¹⁷ Knudson, *The Philosophy of Personalism*, p. 86.

personality the key to the nature of reality and the solution of the ultimate problems of philosophy.”¹⁸

2. Problems for Personalists

The brief description of Personalism given above is highly tentative. It is tentative because of its necessary brevity. It is tentative also because formulated by one who has not been nurtured in it and therefore lacks the familiarity that alone can give it great authenticity. The speaker therefore cordially invites corrections on the part of those for whom personalism has become part of themselves.

Without the benefit of these corrections it is now incumbent on me that I communicate to you some impressions that I have with respect to the system as a whole. And then on the basis of these impressions I would also ask some questions. These questions will point to what seem to me to be unresolved and possibly unresolvable difficulties in Personalism. But all this, let me repeat, I would do in the spirit of John Wesley referred to above.

1. Personalism is Not Eclecticism

Knudson brings out the point that some of its modern critics charge Personalism with being eclectic. It is said by R. B. Perry and others to occupy an intermediary position, a position of unstable equilibrium between absolute idealism and pragmatistic pluralism.¹⁹ In reply Knudson gladly admits that Personalism is not an exclusive point of view. Without grudging it recognizes elements of truth in other systems. “But this is by no means its animating and constructive principle; it is simply incidental to the system, an evidence of its comprehensive, not its composite, character. Personalism is distinctly not an eclectic or compromise philosophy. It is a philosophy born of one great generating insight—the insight into the unique epistemological and metaphysical significance of personality.”²⁰

There is, we believe, no false pride in this contention of Knudson’s. Personalism is not inconsistent with its basic principle if with idealism it opposes realism and if with realism it opposes absolute idealism. For its “one great

¹⁸ *Idem.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 250ff.

generating insight" is that in personality there is direct and intelligible unity of thought and being. Says Knudson: "The basal problem connected with reality is how it can combine unity with diversity and identity with change. The response is that the combination is actually effected in personality."²¹ "We do not know how selves are made and how they succeed in overcoming the antimony between unity and identity, on the one hand, and plurality and change, on the other. The understanding throws no light on the process. But this in no way discredits the fact. The fact is given in experience, and no matter how mysterious it may be, it is conclusive evidence that in reality the problem of unity and diversity is somehow solved. Our self-experience, and it alone, gives us the solution. It is, therefore, no 'arbitrary refuge' to which we resort when we make personality our ultimate and irreducible datum."²²

It is in this manner that what is called the formal and the material aspect of freedom is combined. The freedom required and experienced by personality is not merely the formal power of contrary choice. Freedom as formal power of contrary choice, we are told, requires for its supplement a material that comes to it. In this sense freedom is material that is given. Formal and material freedom together constitute rational freedom.

It is on the basis of personality as an actual experience of rational freedom that the personalist method of coherence is built. And the method is quite consistent with the starting-point. In lieu of his fuller statement of this method by Brightman in his *An Introduction to Philosophy* (1951) his own summary given in his other work *Nature and Values* may be given:

The best way to clarify the situation here is to propose an inclusive definition of reason, as distinguished from the special applications of reason to one field or another. We suggest that reason is an ideal of completely coherent thinking and living, never fully realized, never merely static, yet always imperative in its claims. It is the supreme court of the mind. It consists of the following norms:

Be consistent (eliminate all contradictions).

Be systematic (discover all relevant relations).

Be inclusive (weigh all available experiences).

Be analytic (consider all the elements of which every complex consists).

²¹ *Idem.*, p. 244.

²² *Idem.*, p. 245.

Be synoptic (relate all the elements of any whole to its properties as a whole).

Be active (use experimental method).

Be open to alternatives (consider many possible hypotheses).

Be critical (test and verify or falsify hypotheses).

Be decisive (be committed to the best available hypothesis).

This method is consistent with the concept of personality as discussed above in that it constitutes a deliberate balance between logic and fact. It allows for system but not for abstract, formal system. It allows for fact as given but not for fact as self-existent. It maintains the imperviousness of the finite self as over against the "Nisus toward the Whole" that would swallow it up into the Absolute.²³ It also maintains the creativity of the mind and especially of the mind of God as over against impersonal views of nature.

Still further, and in supplementation of what has already been said, it must be noted that as the principle of personality and the method of coherence are consistent with one another so also the general interpretation of man; nature and God given by Personalism is consistent with both of these.²⁴

"Militant personalism" to use Knudson's phrase, opposes materialism, mechanism, atomism, naturalism and all such sub-personalistic views of nature, man and God.²⁵ Personalism maintains the primacy of "the spiritual life."²⁶ With Ward it would hold that our world is a "realm of ends." Personalism fights against the reduction of moral values to mere descriptive universals.²⁷ Personalism holds to the rightful claims of religion as well as morality next to and even above those of science.²⁸ For, to be intelligible, nature, so far from being independent of God, and self-explanatory apart from God, must be thought of as an organization of the divine consciousness, and so, literally speaking, an integral part of the divine personality.²⁹ Nature is immanent in God, rather than God immanent in nature.

²³ Bernard Bosanquet: 1. *The Principle of Individuality and Virtue*. 2. *The Value and Destiny of the Individual*.

²⁴ Cf. Brightman on "A Christian View of Nature" in *Christian Bases of World Order*, pp. 67ff.

²⁵ Knudson, *op. cit.*, p. 336ff.

²⁶ Cf. Brightman, *The Spiritual Life*.

²⁷ Cf. Brightman, *Moral Laws*.

²⁸ Cf. Brightman, *Personality and Religion*.

²⁹ Cf. Brightman, *Christian Bases of World Order*, p. 74.

"Nature, on this immanentist hypothesis, is in God."³⁰ "Everything that is, is a conscious mind or some phase or aspect of a conscious mind. To speak religiously, the universe consists of God and his family. Nature is divine experience."³¹

In addition to the impression of an admirable internal consistency we must therefore add an expression of deep appreciation for the obviously sincere desire to seek to maintain the "higher values" of life. Personalists themselves are quick to admit that those who are not personalists may well be good men. No doubt many solipsists, naturalists and materialists have been and are "good men." But in the long run civilization would be in safer hands if its leaders were personalists rather than sub-personalists. The same may no doubt be said for personalism as over against absolute Idealism. Though with the personalists we must not withhold from Hegel the praise that is his due for maintaining that the real is the rational yet his followers have all too often run rough-shod over the rights of man as a creature made in the image of God.

Nor is it merely that our moral and religious sympathies naturally turn to Personalism as over against naturalistic or idealistic impersonalism. It would seem true to add that in its negative arguments against these its most outstanding rivals in the modern scene it has the truth on its side.

Uninterpreted things are uninterpretable. Brute facts are mute facts. The "entirely single thing" will always be lost. If all is flux then all is flux. Without the primacy of mind all meaning ceases for man. "Even in the simplest judgment of sense we have found not an interaction of sensations, but an action upon sensations, unique synthesis by thought."³²

Nor is Personalism to be commended only for pointing out that utter irrationalism is involved in the idea of pure contingency. It is equally to be commended for holding that impersonal thought is no effective principle with which to vanquish contingency and irrationality. The laws of thought must not rule over personality but personality must rule over the laws of thought. Accordingly, abstract logic cannot legislate for reality. It is true that we must not believe what is contradictory. It is not true that by the law of non-contradiction it is possible for man to establish what is possible and impossible in nature. The method of rigor and vigor would reduce all things to thought and all thoughts to

³⁰ *Idem.*, p. 77.

³¹ Brightman, *Nature and Values*, p. 114.

³² Bowne, *Theory of Thought and Knowledge*, p. 37.

things. Rather it would reduce all things to one thing and that one thing to one thought.

Thus any tendency leading to some form of the Heraclitean flux or to some form of the Parmenidean one are rightly eschewed by Personalism. And in shunning both extremes, the extreme of the abstract universal and of the equally abstract particular Personalism has greatly helped in reducing the number of apparent possibilities of intelligent speech. It does not hesitate to speak of the absurdities involved in the idea of abstract temporal plurality and in the idea of abstract timeless unity. Personalism does not say that men as men are "absurd." It only maintains that certain theories are absurd.

And with this comes an ever heartening confession of ignorance. Personalism constantly admits that *omnia abeunt in mysterium*. Not only does it admit that all things end in mystery; it admits and maintains that all things begin in mystery.

1. The master concept of personality is itself admittedly both filled with and surrounded by mystery. Its formal power of contrary choice would be empty without the material content that brings it content through contact with its environment. The claim is made that in the most immediate aspects of personal experience there is an intelligible relationship between the world of thought and the world of being. But how this can be so, we have heard Knudson tell us, is a mystery. Brightman asserts something similar. He refuses to have the oneness of thought and thing as found in personal self-consciousness lead to epistemic monism. For then the individuality and uniqueness of personality would be lost. "It is quite possible to say, with the poet, 'I know everything except myself.' Although self-experience is omnipresent and inevitable, self-knowledge is a rare and difficult achievement."³³

2. Again, mystery is not only said to dwell within personality in accordance with its need for both intelligence and uniqueness. This mystery increases inasmuch as that which personality works upon in order to develop itself comes from without. Though its nature is to be self-consciousness, the material with which growth in self-consciousness is to be attained is from without. And is this material impersonal? Shall we broaden the idea of personality so as to include man's animal ancestry? Will pan-psychism solve our problem? Personalists themselves frankly admit that it will not. Quite rightly so. It would be to resort to the method of rigor and vigor. It would be to reduce personality to a principle in

³³ Brightman, *An introduction to Philosophy*, 1951, p. 91.

the interest of unity. The unity would be an abstract one; experience would be left behind.

3. Most of all does mystery obtain, we are told, between the mind of man and the mind of God. Says Bowne: "As a consequence of Kant's work, and of later criticism, philosophy has to steer between a naive dogmatism which criticism has made impossible and an absolute relativity which criticism shows to be self-destructive."³⁴ We are not to claim such knowledge of God as pre-Kantian dogmatism sought. On the other hand we must not deny the possibility of all metaphysics. The "rational believer" seeks for rational probability with respect to the existence of God. And rational probability has in it an element of mystery. Says Bowne: "In short, while theism is demonstrated by nothing, it is implicit in everything. It cannot be proved without begging the question or denied without ending in absurdity."³⁵

And if the idea of the existence of God admittedly involves mystery, such is also true of his nature. God must differ from man. He must be greater than man. The idea of personality is that in which alone unity and diversity are brought into harmony. But human personality does not do this. It is of basic importance to stress this against the "epistemic monism" that is part of absolute idealism. Epistemic monism leads at once to some form of identity philosophy. It leads to the identification of all finite selves with the absolute self and this absolute self turns out to be an abstract principle.

It is only epistemic dualism that maintains the freedom needed for progress in interpretation. "The apparent coherence of monism is attained by denying or minimizing certain facts; panobjectivism, taken literally, denies truth to the subject; and epistemic idealism in the end denies the object (Hegel to the contrary notwithstanding). "Dualism preserves both subject and object."³⁶ Epistemic dualism safeguards the givenness of human experience against the all-absorbing tendency of the Absolute.

But how different from man must God be? Speaking of God Bowne says: "A thought life so different from ours eludes any but the vaguest apprehension on our part. Its unchanging fullness yet without monotony, the structure of the absolute reason also which determines the eternal contents of the divine thought, the timeless and absolute self-possession —how mysterious all this is,

³⁴ Bowne, *op. cit.*, p. 287.

³⁵ Bowne, *Theism*, p. 318.

³⁶ Brightman, *An Introduction to Philosophy*, 1951, p. 93.

how impenetrable to our profoundest reflection. We can see that these affirmations must be made, but we can also see that in a sense they must always lie behind us."³⁷

Yet it is God, the divine person in whom all our problems must ultimately be solved. It is in terms of the divine person that the idea of personality first gets its adequate expression. Human personality is to a large extent conditioned by something that has its source not in itself. "The outer world is an important factor in our mental life. It controls us far more than we do it. But this is a limitation of our personality rather than its source. Our personality would be heightened rather than diminished, if we were self-determinant in this respect. Again, in our inner life we find similar limitations. We cannot always control our ideas. They often seem to be occurrences in us rather than our own doing. The past vanishes beyond recall; and often in the present we are more passive than active. But these, also, are limitations of our personality.

We should be much more truly persons if we were absolutely determinant of all our states. But we have seen that all finite things have the ground of their existence, not in themselves, but in the Infinite, and that they owe their peculiar nature to their mutual relations and to the plan as a whole."³⁸ "In his pure self-determination and perfect self-possession only do we find the conditions of complete personality; and of this our finite personality can never be more than the feeblest and faintest image."³⁹

Still further, as finite personality to a large extent depends for its content upon elements from without that limit its self-expression, these elements themselves find their full reality only as immanent in God. Says Brightman: "Personality is sufficiently complex to contain all the diverse qualities and powers revealed in Nature, but it is also an indivisible but complex unity."⁴⁰ Or again: "Nature, on this immanentist hypothesis, is in God. All of Nature is God's experience."⁴¹

It is thus that epistemic dualism, the distinctness of nature as well as the distinctness of thought, which must be maintained against idealism, at last leads to epistemic monism for God. "The dualism of the finite must be both founded

³⁷ Bowne, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

³⁸ *Idem.*, pp. 167–168.

³⁹ *Idem.*, p. 168.

⁴⁰ Brightman, *Christian Bases of World Order*, p. 75.

⁴¹ *Idem.*, p. 77.

and transcended in a monism of the infinite." ⁴² "Hence to the question, what is the object of the Infinite's consciousness? the answer is, The Infinite himself, his thoughts, states, etc. To the question, when did this consciousness begin? the answer is, Never. To the question, on what does this consciousness depend? the answer is, On the Infinite's own power to know." ⁴³ "In this way we escape the impossible, or unintelligible, identification of thought with being. At the same time we reach a true monism which provides for, while it transcends the finite dualism. We provide also for the element of freedom or contingency necessary to prevent both speculative and ethical collapse. Finally, we make some provision for the problem of human knowledge. The world itself, though more than a thought, is essentially the expression of a thought, and hence lies open to the intelligence. If we assume that the world expresses thought and that our thought has something universal in it, the ground of our parallelism between our thought and the system becomes apparent, and there is no longer any speculative reason why finite minds should not grasp the cosmic fact. Things, as products of creative thought, are commensurable with our intelligence and are essentially knowable." ⁴⁴ "The dualism of the human subject and the cosmic object is at once transcended and explained in the unity of the absolute subject." ⁴⁵

We see then that personalists are quite frank to admit mystery. Even in God, in terms of whom all sub-personal and super-personal forms of philosophy are to be rejected, there is mystery. Says Bowne: "Finally, we may inquire into that structure of the absolute reason which implies the possibility of the finite system. Behind all volition we are compelled to assume a rational nature on which possibility itself depends. Here the clue eludes us. To escape the fatalism of the purely logical reason we have to appeal to freedom, and to escape the abyss of chance and arbitrariness we have to unite the fixity of the intellect with the freedom of volition in the notion of purpose, itself fixed and determined by the notion of the good. But we have little insight into the nature and implications of that purpose, or into its relations to the supreme good. The gloom is deep, and we have to walk circumspectly and with great wariness, testing our results not so much by the possibility of positive comprehension as rather by the negative insight that any other view is fatal." ⁴⁶

⁴² Bowne, *Theory of Thought and Knowledge*, p. 311.

⁴³ Bowne, *Theism*, p. 167.

⁴⁴ Bowne, *Theory of Thought and Knowledge*, p. 314.

⁴⁵ *Idem.*, p. 315.

⁴⁶ *Idem.*, p. 316.

"Irrationalists" might at this point be tempted to claim that all this only proves that "reason is ineffective."⁴⁷ The answer given is that "rational certainty" is all that any human, by any means, can attain with respect to the ultimate issues of life.⁴⁸ Again: Kierkegaard has maintained that reason continually seeks to know existence but that in order to do so it must commit suicide. For reason, he holds, knows only concepts and never comprehends existing particulars.⁴⁹ The answer given is that "all thinking, including Kierkegaard's, is based on the assumption that some concepts do represent existing realities. What must be affirmed here is simply that every act of knowledge about existence is at the same time an act of faith. It is always possible to argue that the ideas I have of other persons, of things, and even of myself, may be groundless dreams, but by faith I know that it is not so."¹

The Christian must be a rational believer. In religion as everywhere he must shun emotional assertions of certainty and follow the method of rational inquiry.

A Mediating Philosophy

In looking over the landscape traversed we recall again that Personalism purports to be a modern philosophy. As a "faith that inquires" and an inquiry based on faith it seeks to offer a "meeting of extremes." It is a mediating philosophy. The question we want now to ask is how far this mediation extends. Does it include the position of Calvinism? The answer would seem to be that it does provided it is modern Calvinism. Dr. Georgia Harkness appears to make a good case for this in a recent work.² Her case is thoroughly reasoned. She is committed to the principle and method of Personalism. This method leads her step by step to the idea of the Ecumenical church. In this ecumenical church liberals, neo-orthodox and conservatives are able to worship together, and they all worship the living Christ. Each will reinterpret his traditional creed in such a way as to exclude no one. All have learned their method of reinterpretation that leads them to this unity that overarches all differences from the method of coherence.³

⁴⁷ L. Harold DeWolff, *The Religious Revolt against Reason*, p. 118.

⁴⁸ *Idem.*, p. 119.

⁴⁹ *Idem.*, p. 124.

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Foundation of Christian Knowledge*.

³ See the writer's review of Dr. Harkness' book in *The Westminster Theological Journal*, May, 1956.

Only fundamentalists will likely exclude themselves from this ecumenical church. They still believe in revelation as thought communication. They have not learned to use the "historical approach to the Bible."⁴ They still argue against biological evolution.⁵ They are literalists.⁶ "Fundamentalism is conservatism turned rationalistic."⁷ "The fundamentalist mind is by nature dissident—that is why we have seen fit to distinguish it from the conservative—and because of its dissidence there can be little meeting ground."⁸

According to Dr. Harkness then the mediating philosophy, with its starting-point in the idea of personality as the master-key for the solution of the problem of predication and with its balanced method of coherence or systematic consistency supports the "voice of the middle" in the modern theological scene.

There is little doubt that the Calvinistic exponents of that "voice of the middle" would agree with Dr. Harkness. The deepest cleavage in modern theological thought can scarcely be said to be that between Arminianism and Calvinism. The modern message of Methodism and the modern message of Calvinism have become one message, the message of personalist dimensionalism.⁹

On the other hand it would seem difficult for modern personalism in theology to find a basic bond of union with such men as John Wesley, Watson and Pope. To be sure, traditional methodism did stress, as over against Calvinism, the experiential approach and the freedom of the will. And in this way no doubt, was hidden a certain measure of preparation for an acceptance of the modern Kantian and post-Kantian view of freedom. Even so the framework of traditional Methodism was much like the framework of traditional Calvinism. From the modern point of view both were authoritarian and dogmatic. From the modern immanentist point of view both held to a doctrine of God that can no longer be accepted. Both believed in the Christ of the Chalcedon creed, the Christ whose person is divine rather than human. This the modern view cannot accept. Both held to the idea of substitutionary atonement. This too the modern view cannot accept.

⁴ *Idem.*, p. 61.

⁵ *Idem.*, p. 63.

⁶ *Idem.*, p. 66.

⁷ *Idem.*, p. 103.

⁸ *Idem.*, p. 114.

⁹ Documented justification of this contention may be found in the writer's *The New Modernism* and in *Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?*

It is therefore to the Personalist as representing the best that the modern point of view can produce that we may address some questions. These questions are interrelated even as the various aspects of Personalism are related.

1. Fundamental to the others is the question whether the concept of personality underlying and controlling all of Personalism can be made more intelligible to us than it now appears to be. In other words, what precisely is the relation between the formal and material aspects of finite personality as these are distinguished from one another by Personalists?

Personalists may reply at once that they do not pretend to have a directly intelligible concept of finite personality. To require man to have a perfectly clear concept of his finite personality is to require him to individuate himself by complete description. It would require Omniscience. And no finite mind is omniscient. Self-identification on the part of the finite mind, involves therefore an element of non-rational self-awareness. Since man has no complete control over that which comes to him from without and, coming from without, conjoins with the formal principle of the liberty of contrary choice to constitute his total personality man may legitimately appeal to mystery when seeking to identify himself. And beyond that, the Personalist may say that he appeals to God as the one who can identify himself in terms of himself and in terms of whom finite personality may identify itself. And we must judge a position by the best it can produce or suggest.

We are therefore face to face with the "problem of God." The problem of God is as to how he may both transcend and found human experiences. God must not be subject to the limitations and "accidents" to which man is subject. He must be truly transcendent? Yet, on the other hand, God must not be "wholly other" than man. There must be a "rational connection" between God and man. Is not man made in God's image?

Can Personalism clarify for us its notion of God as the supreme personality? To do so it would, presumably follow the method suggested by Brightman when he speaks of the expansion of the idea of God. It is similar to the way of negation so familiar from the history of philosophy. It is that by which all limitations clinging to human personality are dropped. In the case of Personalism this would mean that the material aspect of personality is dropped. God's personality is not constituted by that which comes to him from without. Nor is his personality limited by impersonal laws of thought. He is self-definitory. Of Brightman's "theistic finitism" we shall speak presently.

Now the question comes as to whether God is then more than an abstract form. If the idea of the expansion of God is carried through does our God then differ from the God of Aristotle, whose unity is a specific rather than a numeric unity?

The argument of Personalism against sub-personalistic philosophies has been that without thought as primary over matter there is no coherence in experience. And finite thought cannot furnish the required coherence because finite personality is itself, in large measure, dependent for its identity upon that which is accidental to its true self. For the clarification of itself it needs to appeal to God, the true personality. But is not the method employed for the clarification of the idea of finite personality that of absorption? God is not dependent on things. Then, if we are not to deny the reality of things we must say that they are immanent in God. Can they then retain any sort of identity in God?

It is the primacy of personality that gives meaning to life. But finite thought cannot by itself furnish this primacy. It is itself dependent on matter. It is only in God that the true primacy of personality appears. How then is man's assertion of his primacy over matter to be anything more than an emotional desire? To assert that primacy in rational fashion he must needs participate in the nature of divine thought. His own thought must not be subject to change. His whole personality would have to be identified with what the Personalist calls formal personality. Man cannot participate in God as he is. He cannot take the material aspect of his personality with him as he comes to meet with God. If he did then God would not be self-explanatory. He would then be an abstract principle having for its correlative a world of equally ultimate plurality. Hence man and his world must be absorbed into God if God is to be self-explanatory.

But if God is self-explanatory there seems to be no self left even in God. To be self-explanatory he must not be a self. The only experience man has of self-identity is in terms of a combination of rational conception and non-rational perception, in terms of both material and formal selfhood. If God's self is only larger than the human self, if he too is composed of a material as well as a formal principle then he himself needs explanation. And this explanation can only come by the absorption of the self of God as a numerical identity into thought as thought. And then the absolute idealist would seem to be more consistent than the personalist. The absolute idealist has applied the law of non-contradiction to the end in the interest of the expansion of the idea of God. The end has involved the absorption of nature, man and God into a super-personal Absolute.

Brightman recognizes the force of all this. He himself has worked out the expansion of the idea of God to its conclusion for the very purpose of showing that it leads to an identity philosophy. "If we take, then, the expansion of the idea of God as the complete and only truth, we are driven to a pantheism in which God is both good and evil, both false and true, both conscious and unconscious."

¹⁰

But to avoid this evil consequence Brightman is frank enough to say that he knows of no other way than that of "the contraction of God." And this leads him to the notion of the finite God. "It appears that we must either limit God's relations with the actual world or else we must limit the blissful unity of his nature. At least, we need to form a modified conception of his inner bliss in the light of the tragic limits to unity in the world of human struggle."¹¹

The meaning of this general statement may be clearly brought before us, in what Brightman says about the relation of God's eternity to man's experience of time. Says Brightman: "The difficulty of the problem with which we are now dealing is well illustrated by the frank confessions of that acute philosopher Borden Parker Bowne. This realm, he says, is one in which 'we begin to grope.' If we eliminate time altogether from the divine life, the conception is 'hard to grasp.' On the other hand, 'if we admit time into it, the thought of a developing God is a scandal to reason.' On the one hand, then, Bowne finds incomprehensibility, or at least very great difficulty of comprehension; on the other hand, a scandal to reason. There seems little to choose between the two, yet we must choose one. Either the abstract idea of the divine eternity must in some way be modified, or else the Eternal One must surrender his dealings with the world of time. In one way or the other the idea of God must experience contraction."¹²

Brightman offers a similar argument with respect to the freedom of man and the purpose of God. The expansion of the idea of God, he argues, by itself leads to the destruction of both.¹³

Finally Brightman has the courage of his convictions and points out that the "expansion of God above reason contracts the reasonable basis for belief in his

¹⁰ *The Problem of God*, p. 87.

¹¹ *Idem.*, p. 93.

¹² *Idem.*, pp. 99–100.

¹³ *Idem.*, pp. 100–102.

existence.”¹⁴ If God is so wholly other than anything that men experience, then the idea of his existence is virtually meaningless. “Here we have, perhaps, the most perplexing dilemma of all. Either we must lay claim to a knowledge of God, assert that we have by searching found him out, and subject our ideas of him to the limitations of the measuring rods which we now happen to possess, or else we must grant that the whole problem lies beyond our powers and, as far as we know, God does not exist at all, but only mystery.”¹⁵ “A known God must, therefore, be contracted within the limits of our reason.”¹⁶

There appears to be little escape from the cogency of Brightman’s reasoning against the idea of an absolute God by the method proposed in Personalism. It is the same argument, in effect, that has been used against absolute Idealism by various personalists. It is the argument which says that if one measures reality by the law of non-contradiction, then all plurality, all differentiation must cease.

At an earlier point we argued that the argument of Personalism against absolute idealism was sound. Personalism, we contended, was right over against idealism in so far as the latter seems to put logic above personality. Now we seem to argue that absolute Idealism is right in following the laws of thought not only when they sweep away finite but also when they sweep away divine or absolute personality. Is there an inconsistency here?

To answer this question it is imperative to return to the distinction between the formal and material aspects of finite personality. The formal aspect is rational and the material aspect is non-rational in character, so far as man’s knowledge is concerned. From the presence of the material aspects many would draw a solipsistic conclusion. Personalism, together with Idealism refuses to do so. Both maintain the primacy of thought over matter. And both appeal to a thought that is higher than man’s thought in order to make good their argument. In doing this both follow what they call the “demands of thought.” Both use the law of contradiction negatively against every form of “dualism” confronted. Basic to all such “dualisms” is the Creator-creature distinction of traditional or orthodox theology. For this “dualism” of orthodoxy is based on a “monism” in the form of an all-determinative plan of God. Over against the “theological determinism” involved in the orthodox idea of creation in general and of the creation of man in the image of God in particular, the freedom of man, in the sense of autonomy, of the sort Kant maintained, is assumed as an ultimate fact of experience.

¹⁴ *Idem.*, p. 103.

¹⁵ *Idem.*, p. 103.

¹⁶ *Idem.*, p. 105.

With the assumption of freedom in the Kantian sense of autonomy goes that of contingency in general.

The question now comes as to how thought can be related to a reality permeated with contingency. On the face of it one would conclude that there is no contact between the two at all on such a basis. Yet both idealism and Personalism continue to use the law of non-contradiction as though it were legislative for the realm of reality. At least both do so negatively with full assurance that there can be no such God as orthodox Christianity believes to exist. But the price they must pay for this seems to be the price paid by Aristotle when for him the highest principle was non-personal thought. Assuming the starting-point of human personality as autonomous and then using the law of non-contradiction as a negative test of truth leads to the abstract universal of Greek thought. Can Personalists offer anything more solid than the admittedly non-rational aspect of finite personality as the source of the "imperviousness" of the individual? But not even God as a self is "impervious" to the "demands of thought" as conceived of by the would-be autonomous man.

On the other hand the Personalists are negatively right against the absolute idealists when they stress the fact that personality must not be crushed by the "demands of thought." But even this must be qualified. Modern idealists themselves seek to avoid the "abstract universal" of ancient philosophy. One doubts whether the Personalists have given due consideration to this fact. For example, one notices in the writings of Personalists little appreciation of the efforts of Bosanquet when he seeks not to negate but to include the significance of human experience and temporal reality into the life of the Absolute Experience. Bosanquet's "Concrete Universal" cannot forthwith be identified with the "abstract universal" of ancient thought. Even so, relatively speaking, Personalists make a more persistent effort to keep the personality of both man and God from being swallowed up into the impersonal laws of thought.

However, given the starting-point in the idea of human autonomy and with it that of general contingency, the result is that thought and things stand in permanent dualism over against one another. Yet they must be brought into contact with one another. There must be a positive as well as a negative use of the law of non-contradiction. To use the law of contradiction only for the purpose of exclusion is not possible. If one says that the position of "dogmatism" is impossible one has, by implication, asserted that God cannot be self-determinate in the sense in which orthodox theology takes him to be such. God must then be either an abstract principle which includes everything or he must be involved in

the process of time and change with man. Idealism chooses the former and Brightman chooses the latter position.

Over against idealism the charge that human and divine personality have lost their identity seems to be in order. No matter how much Bosanquet, Royce and others seek to retain a measure of uniqueness for the human and the divine self their effort is well-nigh hopeless. They appear to be victimized by their method. To the extent that they retain any uniqueness for personality at all it is by means of a principle of ultimate contingency.

It is therefore greatly to Brightman's credit that he frankly avows his belief in a finite God. Given his own starting-point and method, that is to be expected.

But we must ask Brightman why he did not carry out the implication of his argument to the full. By what right can Brightman retain any distinction between God and man at all? His God is conditioned, it appears, in precisely the same way that men are conditioned. He is conditioned by that which confronts him from without, notably by the will of man. He is also conditioned by that which is within, namely, the Given. There appears to be no reason based on "the demands of thought" why he can then be said to be "the creator of all other persons," or why it can then be said that "his purpose controls the outcome of the universe."¹⁷ The only relation between God and man on Brightman's basis appears to be that of equally ultimate persons, existing somehow in a common environment. And this environment is that of pure contingency.

The only way we can prevent this disappearance of God and man into the abyss of the unrelated is to counteract our argument for the contraction of God by means of an argument for his expansion. And this would lead us back to an absolute God, but only as a halting place. It would lead us back ultimately to the all-absorbing Absolute.

2. The difference between personalists to the effect that some defend the idea of an absolute God and Brightman and Bertocci who defend the idea of a finite God appears to be due to the unstable nature of its method of coherence. Our second question therefore is to the effect whether Personalists can clear up for us their concept of method. Have we misunderstood its meaning? The method sounds very sensible. It seeks to avoid extremes. It wants to do justice to the "demands of thought" and yet be open to new facts. For all its plausibility it appears to consist of a dialectical procedure between "laws of thought" that lead

¹⁷ *Idem.*, p. 113.

to abstract identity and "facts" that are unrelated and cannot be related. If the facts are related they are sublated; if thought has contact with facts it is deflated.

On what ground, other than that of sympathy, can Personalism distinguish its method from that of modern dialecticism both in philosophy and theology? Dr. De Wolff is quite successful in his argument against Irrationalism. Says he: "If there were absolutely nothing analogous in the life of man and the life of God, then for God to become man would be not only a miracle passing all bounds of understanding; it would be an utterly meaningless miracle."¹⁸ "If God is in no way analogous to man or to any other object of rational experience, then for man all meaning is removed from the word 'God.' "¹⁹ The "revolters against reason" have to defend their case in the court of reason. They do not hesitate to attribute to reason the power of determining "when its own bounds are passed."²⁰ And Kierkegaard himself must admit that reality itself is a system for God.²¹ "Since by Kierkegaard's own testimony reality is 'a system for God,' no unsystematic view can be true."²² Quite consistently De Wolff carries through this argument against the idea of the Given in Brightman's philosophy. This idea involves the position that there is in reality "that which is ultimately non-rational." "Especially is this true of Edgar Brightman, who holds that there is much utterly purposeless or 'surd' evil in the world. Such evil he would account for, not by attributing to it some meaning which we can but dimly discern or which is known only to God, but rather by charging its existence to a non-rational 'Given' in the nature of God Himself."²³ But if the "rational nature of God is not metaphysically prior, but only parallel to the non-rational Given, then there is no reason why the non-rational given should give rise to such and such results rather than others."²⁴ "But sin would not have the meaning of sin at all were it not a revolt within the universal context of an essentially rational order."²⁵ Says Knudson: "Absolute goodness presupposes absolute power" and "If the divine will is throughout the ground of the Divine Being, there would seem to be no place in the latter for such an imperfectly assimilated or subdued element as the 'Given' of Professor Brightman's theory calls for."

¹⁸ *The Religious Revolt Against Reason*, p. 127.

¹⁹ *Idem.*, p. 143.

²⁰ *Idem.*, p. 107.

²¹ *Idem.*, pp. 95, 130.

²² *Idem.*, p. 130.

²³ *Idem.*, p. 94.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Cf. Knudson; *The Doctrine of Redemption*, pp. 205ff.

²⁵ *Idem.*, p. 129, ~Cf. Knudson, *Idem.*, pp. 274–75.

With all this we are bound to agree. But the next question is whether the irrationalist cannot put up as good a case against the rationalist as the rationalist can against the irrationalist. In speaking of rationalism the reference is not to "mere analysis and bare abstraction." We are thinking of the method of coherence, of systematic consistency or of "the comprehensive reason of coherence" which the Personality professes to employ.²⁶ "The reason of comprehensive coherence seems the most adequate rational instrument for discerning truth. Its superiority to more abstract and limited procedures is especially evident in dealing with the problems which are chief concerns in religion."²⁷

When this method of coherence deals with the "data provided by experience has it really made provision for a rational foundation for these data in the metaphysical priority of God? And has it made provision for something "analogous in the life of man and in the life of God?" De Wolff asserts that: "The relation of man to God is by no means devoid of all mediation by universals."²⁸ "All that is required by reason is that there be some relations between God and man."²⁹

It is one thing however to assert that "absoluteness is the fundamental and differentiating characteristic of Deity,"³⁰ another to show how there may be some "mediation by universals" between such a God and ourselves as human beings. According to Knudson the absoluteness of God must be consistent with the "freedom" of man in the sense of the power of contrary choice. Speaking of theological determinism in relation to naturalistic determinism he says: "One may be spiritual and the other naturalistic in its grounding, but a spirituality that does not involve the power of contrary choice would seem hardly distinguishable from mechanism."³¹ But the power of contrary choice is itself but the formal aspect of human personality. To it must be added the material aspect. Moreover, the exclusion of "theological determinism as a whole implies the idea of contingency as an aspect of the world that constitutes the environment of man. Thus the freedom of the will is not absolute. It is limited. "Indeed this limitation is itself in one respect virtually absolute."³² In fact "the power of contrary choice may itself

²⁶ *Idem.*, p. 207.

²⁷ *A Theology of the Living Church*, p. 23.

²⁸ *Idem.*, p. 125.

²⁹ *Idem.*, p. 132.

³⁰ Knudson, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 254.

³¹ Knudson, *The Doctrine of Redemption*, p. 156.

³² Knudson, *Idem.*, p. 165.

be regarded as an act of divine grace.”³³ Thus God is in any case confronted with a “given” element. And if he is to be mediated by means of universals to man it can be only by means of such universals as stand above both God and man. Or if they do not stand above God and man, then they must absorb both God and man. If we are to avoid carrying our finitude with its frustrations into God, this God must be wholly other than man. And when he is wholly other than man then there is nothing analogous between God and man.

In other words, the argument for the absoluteness of God as carried on by Knudson and De Wolff does, against all contrary intentions, lead logically on to the Absolute of idealism. This absolute is but an abstract form that acts as a correlative to the abstract particulars of an ultimate non-rational or contingent plurality. On the method of coherence employed by Personalism it appears that we can have no conceptual contact with God. Or if we do, the difference between us as men and God as God will be effaced. We may have a God who is absolute while we are absolute with him. Or we may have a God who is finite and we are finite with him.

But we must, of course, give the Personalist full opportunity to point out where we have misunderstood his position.

3. Meanwhile it should be noted that unless the Personalist can clarify his position we must hold that he does not, by his philosophy and theology serve the best interests of morality and religion. To say this is not to withdraw anything from appreciation earlier expressed. As over against materialism on the one hand and idealism on the other we rejoice in the position of personality. But we are now to inquire whether Personalism can furnish a positive foundation for the objectivity of either morality or religion. And then it appears that it cannot unless by the objectivity of morality and religion nothing more is meant than a projection and hypostatization of the progressive ideals of the human race.

If no God can be found who in any significant sense can be said to be beyond man, it is not possible to be created by him and obligated to him, to sin against him and be saved by him.

Again, if the power of contrary choice is itself a gift of grace then what is there left in man to represent nature? The only thing that then remains is the material aspect of personality. And this is by definition non-rational in character. Man’s environment is then *ab initio* non-rational. If it is then said that he is made in the

³³ *Idem.*

image of God this is symbolic language which must not interfere with the fact that human reason has sprung by chance from animal ancestry. The distinction between what is and what ought to be can at best be no more than the difference between what man individually, or collectively thinks is best. The foundation for the power of contrary choice by which man decides that a God who created the world and man out of nothing cannot exist then appears to be itself based on chance. Reason has no πού᾽ στῶ. Religion can no longer be a reasonable religion. Faith becomes blind faith.

And with the destruction of the foundation for morality and religion goes the destruction of philosophy, science and culture in general. They all rest for their intelligibility on the internal coherence of personality. With the disappearance of that coherence goes the collapse of all of man's cultural effort.

Is it not time then that modern Methodism reconsider the advisability of a return to traditional Methodism? To be sure, the present writer does not offer traditional Methodism as a final resting place. It has, it would appear, in its conception of freedom, something of the weakness that led to an acceptance of the modern view of freedom as autonomy, with, what now is seen to be the inability of accounting intelligibly for human experience. Even so, for the moment at least, as earlier suggested, traditional Arminian theology, ascribed a solid foundation to human personality in its doctrine of creation. And again, though in consequence of its doctrine of freedom it withdrew something from the rationality itself found in the universe by virtue of God's plan, yet, it was quite opposed to the modern idea of contingency. In short its philosophy and theology was "dogmatic." It was based on the Bible as containing the product of God's thought communication to man. Personal confrontation between God and man was mediated through the Bible so conceived. Its doctrine of sin, as Wesley's position clearly indicates, is based on the idea that man has transgressed the law of God and is rightfully subject to the permanent exclusion from God's presence, unless God himself, in the Person of his Son, bears the penalty due to man for his sins and thus brings man back to God. Christ's personality was not brought down into history in order to bring it into contact with man. It was thought that God had from the beginning spoken to man as well as manifested himself in the works of his hands.

Would it not seem that traditional Personalism is more personalistic than is modern Personalism? Full personalism would seem to be impossible on any but the traditional basis. For full personalism requires that the human person meet the divine Person through the medium of the data of experience as well as

through the medium of the constitution of its own consciousness. In particular, full personalism seems to require that the finite person be fully intelligible to the divine person by virtue of man's being the creature of God, and therefore analogous in all respects to God, is man in contact with truth and reality.

In rejecting the traditional or "dogmatic" notion of the creation of man in the name of the power of contrary choice does not modern Personalism take away from under man the only support that can keep him from disintegration? Or rather it seeks, *per impossibile*, to take away the very foundation on which it actually stands. We believe therefore that reason is "ineffective" when based on the Personalist's view of personality. It has no defense against irrationalism. It has no defense against rationalism.

It was suggested above that traditional methodism is not offered as a final resting place. The final resting place for human experience would seem to be the frank and unqualified acceptance of the traditional framework with its notion of God as controlling and directing his creation by his plan. This plan envelops the actions of the will of man. The material as well as formal aspect of man's freedom are then found to be implied in one another as together they rest upon the plan of God. Man is then from the beginning in contact with truth. His will does not need to operate in a vacuum. His sin, and the consequent sense of guilt, relates to God rather than to the void. Man's concepts and his precepts do not stand in antagonism to one another. Man does not need to reduce the data of experience to an abstract conceptual system in order to understand them.

To be sure, he will not fully understand either himself or the world or God. Relatively speaking he knows very little indeed. But he does not need to be able to show how his eternal concepts intervene with a system of eternal concepts in order to believe in God. He is ignorant of many things. He does not fully comprehend even one thing. But his ignorance is a legitimate ignorance.

In this the traditional Christian differs, it would appear, from the modern Christian. The modern Christian, unless he be a rationalist or a materialist, frankly admits ignorance of many things. But he goes further than that. He says in effect that because man cannot know anything exhaustively he cannot be certain of anything. This amounts to saying that he is certain that there can be no God who knows all things by virtue of his control of all things. It amounts in effect to making a universal negative predication about all reality without benefit of authority. Does Personalism escape from this?

To be sure, the modern Christian can raise plausible objections to the position of the traditional Christian. There is the "obvious objection" raised again and again by Personalists that there must be liberty of contrary choice for man or all is meaningless.

This is the problem of identification. And it is basic to all things else. It is foundational even to the question of non-contradiction. For the law of non-contradiction cannot function except upon a self-intelligent fulcrum. The modern view of autonomy uses the law of non-contradiction without furnishing a fulcrum for it. The traditional view presupposes this fulcrum as being found in God. God says I am. He is self-determinate. And so he tells me who he is, namely, a creature made in God's image. This is authoritarianism without qualification. But it appears also to be the only position in which the idea of man's self-awareness becomes intelligible. For the only alternative to it seems to be to have human self-awareness function in a void.

As created by God man's self-conscious activity is not passive. It is truly creative. But it is creative in analogical fashion. Not attempting the impossible, it finds no contradiction between its responsible reaction and the original action of God as ultimately self-determinate. The self-determinate God is the only basis that protects man's responsible reactions from disintegration.

A second objection to the traditional position, involved in the first, pertains to its methodology. This involves more directly the problem of non-contradiction. It involves also the problem of free scientific investigation. Personalism claims that its method does justice to both the demands of logic and of fact. The traditional view holds that unless logic and fact, thought and being, unity and multiplicity are presupposed as having their harmony in God they will, ever after, be unable to make fruitful contact with one another. This claim fits in with and presupposes that of the self-identification of God. The two together claim to offer true Personalism.

The charge against it is twofold in character. It is said to be deterministic and rationalistic. It is also said to be arbitrary and destructive of the process of free inquiry.

The traditional Christian would reply that as Personalists rightly require that ultimate reality be rational this requirement is not met unless it is presupposed as resting on the self-determinate God. With its principle of the liberty of contrary choice modern personalism seeks intelligent self-identification ultimately in finite personality and then offers this its principle of self-identification as the fulcrum

for the operation of the laws of thought. But finite personality can be thought of intelligently only on the presupposition of the idea of the self-intelligent God. And on the basis of the idea of this God alone is it possible to avoid both rationalism and irrationalism, both determinism and pure contingency, or a combination of them.

Orthodox Personalism holds that only on its basis does the methodology of science appear to be intelligible. Without the facts of creation and providence there would be no rational universe. As there is true created reality in man so there is true created reality in the cosmos as a whole. Both rest on the idea of God as self-determinate and upon the idea of his having an ultimately all-encompassing control of the cosmos. On this basis man is truly free to follow the facts where they may lead him. To be sure, they cannot lead him to the identification of man and the world with God. That would be rationalism and determinism. Nor can they lead him to the submergence of God with man in a shoreless and bottomless sea of contingency. That would be irrationalism.

Setting up no false or exhaustive conceptual penetration of the relation between man and God orthodox Personalism is saved from the collapse that follows from the failure to attain this ideal.

Orthodox Personalism does not, to be sure, pretend to have no problems. It does not, in one sense, pretend to have solved any problem. It believes in an incomprehensible God. And all things are dependent upon this incomprehensible God. Hence all things are incomprehensible. That is nothing is fully penetrable to the mind of man.

But though incomprehensible to man God is not incomprehensible to himself. God is light and in him is no darkness at all. And there, basically, it appears, lies the difference between modern and orthodox Personalism. Modern Personalism virtually assumes that it has in the concept of finite personality a fully comprehensible and ultimate starting-point for the interpretation of experience. On this basis it employs the law of non-contradiction and denies the possibility of the existence of God as self-determinate. And therewith it draws God down with man into pure contingency. Thus all hope of predication ceases.

With great appreciation for modern personalism in its sincere effort to offer a personalist interpretation of life we must, till further enlightened, continue to hold that it is in orthodox Personalism alone that a truly personalist philosophy of life is given. Only if man allows God to identify himself and man alike, and to assign to man his task in the world can man and his culture be saved from ruin.

Does not Traditional Personalism then appear as the only true safeguard of morality and religion as well as the only true safeguard of science and philosophy? Modern Personalism is so immanentistic that it ultimately requires man to be intelligible in terms of himself, to set his own ideals, to reduce the Christ to a hypostatization of those ideals and the Holy Spirit to the general high-mindedness of non-Christian humanitarianism. Where then remains man's sense of creaturehood? His sense of sin? Where is there grace to save him from his sin? Excluding the possibility of the existence of a really transcendent God, a real creator, how can man sin and need forgiveness? And if he could sin and be aware of the need of grace where would be the grace to save him?

*Finish*¹

¹Van Til, C., & Sigward, E. H. (1997). *The works of Cornelius Van Til, 1895-1987* (electronic ed.). New York: Labels Army Co.