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ANTITHESIS

Speculation in Pre-Christian Philosophy, by Richard Kroner. Westminster. \$5.75.

This is the first of three volumes in which Professor Richard Kroner, lately of Union Seminary, now at Temple University, will attempt to explain the entire history of philosophy on the basis of an antithesis between impersonal, objective speculation and practical, personal revelation.

While this antithesis at first sight seems eminently applicable to medieval philosophy, one wonders whether it can contribute to the understanding of the Greek period.

In defense of the thesis that Greek philosophy is a compound of speculation and revelation, Kroner begins with the somewhat enthusiastic assertion that Thales' speculation is "an analogue to the revealed truth on which Christian thinkers later relied" (p.10).

After Thales, "from the perspective of the relation between revelation and speculation it is of supreme importance that Anaximander, though on the level of cosmotheism or pantheism, thus approached the biblical conception of the Supreme Being. He anticipated what the Bible and Christian theology mean by the infinite" (p. 83).

Here Kroner tries to argue that Anaximander's Infinite is not something potential, but a mysterious Actual; and that the ordinary interpretation which views the boundless simply as the reservoir of physical stuff out of which our cosmos developed, "as if only the language were imaginative ... is extremely arbitrary and 'unscientific'" (p. 85). Yet the doxographical material supports the usual interpretation, as does the matrix of pre-Socratic philosophy from which it comes. Even if Anaximander's boundless were infinite in space (a view against which Cornfed has raised sober objections), and still more if the boundless is infinite in the sense of having no definite quality, it would be hard to see any resemblance to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

When further it is said that the stories about Socrates (drinking the rest of the crowd under the table?) "immediately put us in mind of the gospel stories" (p. 133), one is reminded of the Platonic thesis in the *Phaedo* that that which stimulates the memory need have no resemblance to what is remembered. Here Kroner has given himself over to pure impressionism; and his other assertion that "all historians of philosophy agree that he (Socrates) is the greatest figure in the history of philosophy" (p. 151) is simply false.

A number of times Kroner modifies his first breath-taking statements. "Socrates was a Greek

anticipation and counterpart of Jesus Christ” (p. 133); but then adds, “the difference between the Son of God and the Athenian ... is so enormous that it makes any comparison absurd and ridiculous.” Quite so! And therefore his prior assertion is absurd and ridiculous.

The constant aim seems to be to picture Greek philosophy and the Christian Gospel as essentially the same. In one place it almost seems as if the New Testament contributed nothing to Christianity. “In Philo, Greek speculation and biblical revelation met ... The whole movement of pre-Christian speculation, directed toward a more holy and ethical conception of the divine being than that offered by Greek religion, culminated and terminated in this great event. ...” And Kroner refers with evident approval to another author who held that “without Philo there would be no Irenaeus, Athanasius....” Again, “He taught that the ideas are the thoughts of the living God.... Through this simple device Philo threw a bridge across the chasm diving two spiritual spheres” (p. 237-238).

Aside from the fact that in these lines Kroner denies that Plotinus and Neoplatonism are the culmination and termination of Greek philosophy, this interpretation not only ignores the New Testament as a prerequisite for Athanasius, but it also minimizes the role of the Old Testament for Philo. It pictures Philo's philosophy as arising, not altogether, but predominantly out of Greek themes. This is most clear in what I take to be a serious failure to grasp the significance of Philo's making the ideas thoughts of God. This is no superficial transformation of Platonism, no simple device to bridge a narrow chasm.

In the *Euthyphro* when piety is defined as that which is dear to the gods, Plato asks, Are pious things pious because they are dear to the gods, or are they dear to the gods because they are pious? Now, it is not surprising that Plato chose the second alternative, but it is extremely instructive to note that he does not bother in the least to give a single reason for rejecting the first. Usually Plato gives reasons for rejecting a proposal; but not here. Does this not indicate that Plato was unable even to conceive of a God on whose will morality depends? Instead of a God who legislates, Plato could conceive only of a God subordinate to independent laws.

Philo therefore, rather than having been the culmination of a tendency already in paganism, broke completely with its deepest convictions and insisted on the totally different biblical conceptions of sovereignty and transcendence. No doubt there are similarities between Philo and Plato or the Stoics; but they are superficial. (Cf. my *Thales to Dewey*, pp. 183-210.)

But perhaps the major defect of the book is its hazy notion of revelation. Kroner's characterizations are as follows: “Revelation is the work of God; the truth of revelation is practical, personal, an indemonstrable; God does not incline himself to man in order to inform him, but to command, advise, and redeem; such divine actions do not provide theological information; theological

information is incompatible with the true relationship between the Creator and the creature.”

These representations partly depend on an incomplete disjunction and partly on a neglect of biblical themes. Of course it is true that God commands and redeems; but this is not incompatible with his giving information to man. When God said to Abraham, “Thous shalt be a father of many nations,” it was information; and when John wrote, “the World [sic] was made flesh,” it was information. Now, it may be true that God's redemptive acts do not of themselves inform; but in addition to the act God has provided us with its explanation. 'Christ died' is the act, but 'for our sins' is the informative theology. Far from theological information being incompatible with the true relationship to our Creator and Redeemer, this true relationship is impossible without a minimum of information; and the more the better. Like the Athenians we cannot worship an unknown God.

Existential anti-intellectualism is no contribution to Christian or Greek Philosophy, either.

GORDON H. CLARK