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Religious Experientialism and Irrationalism

I think I made rather clear the purpose of the course and what it was to contain. That the defense of Christianity must be systematic. And in order to meet other systems, we have spent the time so far chiefly in arguing against all forms of empiricism. Now the empirical apologetes do wish to be systematic to a certain extent and they also, at least when occasion arises, attempt to answer questions from science, as I gave you a little example on the board last time, and they may have some notions of historiography and psychology and so on.

Now then, there are, there are religious views, I won't call them Christian views, but at any rate religious views that sometimes claim to be Christian which would reject both apriorism, which I defend, and also empiricism which I do not defend, as you found out, but who reject the whole notion of system. And so for today and maybe tomorrow, I want to talk about this other view which we have not discussed yet.

John E. Smith, professor of philosophy at Yale University is farther removed from Schleiermacher and is even violently, well, very vigorously opposed to sensory empiricism. I hope you have read enough about Schleiermacher to understand a reference to him. Schleiermacher is father of modernism as it captured the main bodies of Christianity here in this country from well, it was being introduced before world war one, and it continued until about the end, roughly, or the beginning or the end of world war two. A system of religion that was commonly called modernism. This was based on Schleiermacher. But Schleiermacher's experience was a religious experience. The feeling of complete dependence.

Now, John E. Smith is farther removed from Schleiermacher and is vigorously opposed to, more vigorously than Schleiermacher was, to sensory experience. For both these reasons he is a good example of non-Humean empiricists. It is essential of course to explain what he means by experience. Smith begins his rejection of the earlier empiricism with the sentence, "It is often said by theologians that an analysis starting with the universal fact of religion involves us in a morass of subjectivity and forces us to depend entirely upon human experience. They are too willing to accept an outmoded conception of what it, experience, is and means. The philosophical standpoint required for this task is that of radical empiricism making central the doctrine that experience is an objective and critical product of the intersection of reality, in all its aspects, on the one hand, and a self-conscious being capable of receiving that reality through significant form on the other. Despite much talk of empiricism in modern philosophy actual experience in its full range and depth has frequently been ignored."

And of course I've omitted a few sentences here and there as you see with the three dots. And you can find it in *Experience and God*, page 11 where he is giving his introductory explanation of how he is going to proceed.

From the time of Aristotle to the present, the term experience has indeed been used to designate a full a full range and depth of the intersection between reality and a self-conscious being. One must not quarrel about this linguistic usage. You can use those words if you want. Aristotle spoke of experienced carpenters. You know if you go out and get a job they ask you, have you got any experience? And you answer, yes I saw the color blue on my way here this morning. They wouldn't understand your answer.

They're using the word experience in a totally different sense. And this was Aristotle's sense. Aristotle spoke of experienced carpenters, experienced musicians. The trouble however lies in explaining how such people became experienced. They were not born that way. They had to practice. They had to begin with something much more simple than experience in this sense of the term. Therefore, if one is an empiricist there must be an experienced otherwise defined.

Smith speaks of a critical product of the intersection of of reality, in all its aspects, on the one hand, and a self-conscious being capable of receiving that reality. Nice sentence, isn't it? How is such a being capable? What is the method of receptivity? Is there any evidence of a reality that can intersect with a self-conscious being? What does intersection mean? A philosopher, like Smith, a philosopher who claims other philosophers have ignored the full range of experience, should not ignore the problem of explaining how a critical product can be produced. Smith ignores the problem of explanation. He does not ignore the early empiricism that made a brave attempt. Only he does not think the attempt brave or successful. "There have been for example narrow theories of experience, that would confine it to data supposedly disclosed through the senses. Atomic data exclusive of relations. The chief obstacles that have hindered the development of an adequate theory of experience in modern philosophy are these. First, many have assumed that experience is a mental product. Experience is a mental product in the consciousness of the individual." Pages 22 and 23.

Now that isn't his only objection. That is his first objection, yes. Obstacle or others. Obstacle or others. So the chief obstacle, the chief obstacles that have hindered the development of an adequate theory of experience is that experience is supposed to be mental. An individual.

Yet Smith himself posited a self-conscious receptive being. Is not even the full range and depth of a carpenter's experience mental, conscious, and indeed subjective? How much more subjective must be the experiences out of which the carpenter critical constructs his product? Therefore must not a careful thinker reject as false Smith's assertion that "in the most basic sense experience is a many-sided product of complex encounters between what there is and a being capable of responding to and expressing it." Let me read that sentence again. Let me read that sentence again and you try to think about it. Because of what was said in the preceding paragraphs, I suggest that a careful thinker rejects Smith's assertions as false.

"In the most basic sense, not in some developed sense like some experienced carpenter, but in the most basic sense experience is a many-sided product, well if its basic how can it be a product of anything? Well, I'll read the sentence. In the most basic sense experience is a many-sided

product of complex encounters between what there is and a being capable of responding and expressing it.”

Surely this cannot be the most basic sense of experience. Encounters in the plural cannot be more basic than the first encounter in the singular. There must be something that precedes the critical product. Must not the self-conscious being respond to this more elementary X. And if it is the response of a self-conscious being, must not the experience be mental? Now I hope next week there will be time enough for me to discuss behaviorism with you to a certain extent, where there is a more determined attempt to deny that experience is mental.

The behaviorists of course say there is no such thing as consciousness. No such thing as anything mental. And it's all physics and chemistry. And I want to take that up I must save a day or two for that.

Without such a mental event how can the responding receptive being learn what is there? But no, “The chief error of taking experience as mental or subjective consists in the uncritical assumption that experience is a record or a report to be found entirely within the mind.” Smith rejects this because it leads to subjective idealism and therefore to skepticism. Since this result makes him feel uncomfortable, he refuses to explain how a non-mental experience can teach a conscious being that there is an external reality. Furthermore, if experience is a product of two factors, a stone and a person, then each equally has the experience. The experience belongs to the stone quite as much as it belongs to the person. Then, he admits that of course, and then I ask a question, then is the stone also a self-conscious being? If it has experience isn't a self-conscious being? Didn't he say that before? If on the other hand the experience does not belong to both in the same way, the person must have something the stone does not have. And is not this something a subjective mental experience that leads the person to think that what he sees is a stone?

Indeed Smith cannot avoid these embarrassments. He acknowledges that, and you note the quotes, I don't like to say quote unquote all the time and you have it printed in front of you. He acknowledges that experience is much more than a reflection or mirror image of what is encountered. The one who experiences refracts as well as reflects. The total nature of the being who experiences enters into the transaction which means that the being is not simple a theoretical knower. But does not refraction indicate that the person alters what is there and therefore does not receive it as it is? Such a theory results in a reality that is unknowable and an experience that is unjustifiable.

What is true of so-called experience of a stone is even more obviously true of religious experience. Smith introduced his basic definition of a rich and varied experience for the purpose of defending of God and religion from scientism, mechanism, and irreligion. But once again, it is impossible to derive any positive religion from the religious dimension of experience. This leaves unsupported, not so much the denial that Christianity is final and exhaustive as his assertion that Buddhism and Hinduism contain true revelations from God. One would like to see a detailed step-by-step account of how experience justifies this or that truth in Hinduism. I want to emphasize step-by-step the details and general, probably sometimes you must need general or

universal propositions but you must work it out step-by-step. It is, to use an example, you know I like to play chess and I'll play chess with any of you. It will bring a board and men around, just get me I'll play. But, suppose I were giving some lessons to someone in chess. Well I should say, you must control the center of the board and make your pieces interact with each other or something like that. That isn't teaching a person how to play chess. Those statements are true, but they mean very little. I must tell you precisely what piece to move from where to where. And you must know the exact openings for the first ten moves. As many of you can. I have a book on openings. It is about 250 pages. Each page it has five columns of openings. And each column has 12 or 15 moves of it. So if you take 5 columns on one page and multiply that by 250 you will see how many openings there are in the book. And each one goes 12 to 15 moves. That's learning chess. Of course, Bobby Fischer was just born knowing it all, he didn't have to study it. Just innate with Fischer, but our innate knowledge doesn't quite equal that of Bobby Fischer's.

One would like to see a detailed step-by-step account of how experience justifies this or that truth in Hinduism. If the alleged truth is definite, even the author admits the gap. But if the truth is vague enough to be found in some form in all three religions, the God is the common characteristic of Jehovah, Shiva, and Nirvana. And this is nothing at all, as I tried to show you in the first chapter of the 3R book.

These considerations ruin some 20 pages of non-Chalcedonian christology as well as the assumption underlying a discussion of the book of Job. So far as the present writer can see, the best the author does with this situation is to appeal to a "living reason" that depends on convincing conversation which by the canons of logic is fallacious. So you must use fallacies to defend your religion. Such fallacious "living reason" can develop the content of experience in any direction it wishes. Christianity, liberal or orthodox, Buddhism, and Hinduism follow equally well.

Now as for the rest, the thing to do for you if you are interested, and I don't you can do it this coming week, but you might try, is to get Smith's book and read it and compare with what I say on these three pages and come to your own conclusion. But this is the core of my refutation of that form of empiricism which depends on religious experience and doesn't have much to do with sensory experience.

Now, as I said at the beginning of the hour, I want to go on to those empiricists, well they're really not, well in a sense they are empiricists, those who reject the notion of systematic apologetics. They don't like logic, they don't like system, and so on.

As you know, Modernism is almost extinct. Now I know some seminaries that are still, well anyhow I know professors in seminaries, the professors are still thoroughgoing modernists. I played chess with one for thirty years. And I know precisely what he thought. Not only about chess, but other things too. And his seminary was basically modernistic, although this irrationalism was creeping into it at the time. And there are a few others I suppose who are still modernists. But the main religious movement of the present day is irrationalism. And this has taken over most of the seminaries. And that's what I want to discuss.

Soren Kierkegaard and Karl Marx, the two of them were both students of Hegel. I wish I had time to explain Hegel more at length. But that would require an hour or two. Maybe I can add a few little things as we go on. You'll have to sorta guess at it. But if you want to get an elementary account of Hegel you can read my very elementary book of the title *Thales to Dewey* and read the chapter on Hegel. And if you think it's difficult, you read Hegel and then you'll think what I wrote is very easy.

In addition to a little pomposity and a semblance of omniscience, there was a definite point at which the anti-Hegelian reaction, Feuerbach and Marx as well as Kierkegaard, a definite point at which the anti-Hegelian reaction took aim. It was the existence of the individual. This occupied the attention of German philosophy for quite a period of time in the 19th century. There is a volume, oh the title of the volume is, I think it is *Von Hegel Zum Nietzsche*, from Hegel to Nietzsche. It's an account of German philosophy in the 19th century. And the author's name is, he was a professor in Heidelberg. I attended Heidelberg university but of course I can't remember his name. I didn't attend his class. I'll think of it this afternoon sometime.

But this very interesting book describes in detail the theories of individuality that were promulgated during the nineteenth century. Individualism of a certain type. And it was very interesting. Kierkegaard was one of them, Marx was not one of them. Marx is an anti-individualist. Feuerbach and Marx are socialists, communists. Kierkegaard was an individualist. They were both, Marx and Kierkegaard were both students of Hegel. I have tried to figure out whether they were in class together, but I've not been able to dig up that information. It is of course quite possible and I might even say probably that they did not meet as students. After all a professor teaches for quite a number of years and students come and go. And I would suspect that Kierkegaard was perhaps a later student of Hegel's some years later. Marx was earlier, but I don't know.

Well, alright. In addition to pomposity and omniscience, Feuerbach, Marx, and Kierkegaard took aim at his rejection of the individual. They aimed at his denial of the existence of the individual. When Hegel attempted to deduce Kant's inexplicable given, and of course Hegel rejected the idea of anything given, and he annihilated Kant. He showed very clearly that there is nothing given. When Hegel attempted to deduce Kant's inexplicable given, namely the data, the things given, data means givens of sensation, he analyzed one concept after another, arranging them in a cohesive system. A word his opponents spelled with a capital S in derision. Such a system of concepts is a system of universals. Admittedly the concepts of being, quality, cause and so on are universals.

And maybe I interrupt and remark to you, I hope you have perceived that my apologetics has no abstract concepts in it. I don't agree with Plato or with Hegel in making concepts basic. I make propositions basic. And Hegel took some time to object to propositions and denounced them as mistaken. And you will find some of this in *Thales to Dewey*, a little bit, where I try to defend the reality of propositions against the reality of concepts. And again I will point out to you that St. Augustine rejected abstract concepts and had only propositions.

Well there's a lot behind this that you can't give as class in three weeks. We ought to have three years, then we could go over it a little more carefully. Yes Roy?

Audience (Roy): Could you define what a concept is?

Yes, I think I have done this before, but I'll do it again. The usual explanation is, I say usual because there is one exception. The usual explanation is that you start with sensory data, you have these data produce images, and then you collect certain images and in a very mysterious way produce an abstract concept. I say in a mysterious way because Aristotle doesn't really explain the process. I told you before that he uses an illustration. He says it is like an army which is disorganized and in route. And then one soldier makes a stand; that is supposed to be one image. And another soldier makes a stand, and another soldier makes a stand, and then as that goes on, the whole army is again organized. Now I sometimes use illustrations to wake the students up. But I don't depend on illustrations. Illustrations, since they are illustrations, are not what you're talking about. The illustrations are supposed to refer to what you are talking about. So it's not the same thing. And they can always be misunderstood. But it does wake the class up sometimes. And Aristotle doesn't given any explanation. He just uses this illustration. And without an explanation, I have nothing to report except what he said. And so I don't know a ...

Well, Locke does, Locke does something better. But he got, he got himself in a jam, but I can't go through all the history of the 18th century British philosophy. Now, for Hegel, Hegel didn't do it quite that way. He sorta gave a preliminary survey and started with the concept which was both most universal and most empty. That's the concept of being. And then by a dialectical process, which is the concept of being turns into its contradictory, and then a third concept merges the two contradictories. And having merged the two contradictories, it develops its contradictory and then the next concept will merge those two and so on until you get to a top concept which is also all-inclusive, but explicitly inclusive, whereas the first concept was implicitly exclusive. Well that's a very short and brief picture of Hegel's theory. But in this dialectical process, there is no individual. Admittedly the concepts of being, quality, cause and so on, Hegel has about 200 concepts which he has arranged in his system. Kant only had 12 concepts, you know.

Such a concept is a system of universals, like being, quality and cause. So also are the concepts life, motion, soul, and reason. All of which are in Hegel's list of some 200 categories. But, objected his opponents, there is no motion in the concept of motion. My pen, with which the obscure Herr Krug challenged the great professor, my pen cannot be deduced from the concept of thing. And more important, I myself cannot be found in life or reason. Individuals, those things and persons, do not occur in the system. Hegel could not explain himself. Maybe the system had a place for The Philosopher, be Hegel himself, Descartes, and Aristotle were absent.

Many people regard this circumstance as fatal to rationalism. Kierkegaard had a further reason for reacting against empty universals. He was a Christian. At least he talked as he thought Christians ought to talk. And since Christianity offers eternal salvation to human individuals, individuals are important in the extreme. Whether the philosopher succeeds or fails in properly

arranging the concepts of being and life, is a trivial matter. But whether I myself, just this one individual person, me, attains heaven is a matter of eternal life or eternal death.

There are also other individuals that strike Kierkegaard's attention, though with a different result. Namely, individual historical events. I might interject here, it is strange that Kierkegaard was so much interested in human individuals, he was not interested in individual historical events. Though if they are individuals he ought to have been very happy about them. But we'll see what he says. He had a different view of individual historical events.

Now, if Herr Krug's pen was sufficiently pointed to puncture Hegel's pomposity, one would think that existentialism, concerned as it is with individual existences, would show some interest in individual events. Is not Napoleon more important to a historian than a pen? And must not a Christian take interest in Jesus of Nazareth?

Through the centuries Christianity has taught that Jesus Christ was crucified under Pontius Pilate on the third day, that's the 14th of Nisan, rose from the dead on the 16th of Nisan. These are dated, historical, individual events. But, strangely, Kierkegaard is completely uninterested. He asks, in italics, is a historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness? And I have a footnote on that that you can read and think about after a while. Is a historical point of departure possible for an eternal consciousness? How can such a point of departure have any other than a mere historical interest? Is it possible to base an eternal happiness upon historical knowledge? Of course his answer is no. And this is put on the title page as a sorta a motto for the whole book.

Traditional apologetics and theological prolegomena use these events to prove the truth of Christianity, or used various historical evidences to prove the truth of these events. But Kierkegaard will not raise the question of the truth of Christianity. Nor is he interested in the systematic zeal of the personally indifferent individual to arrange the truths of Christianity in paragraphs. Remember, I said just a few minutes ago before I began reading that there was a form of empiricism that rejected system. And Kierkegaard is the most obvious example, the best known example, of that reaction. He wants to deny system. He's not interested in historical events. Not interested in systematic zeal and indifferent paragraphs. What Kierkegaard with discuss is the concern of the infinitely interested individual for his own relationship to such a doctrine.

One reason for ignoring the truth of Christianity is the impossibility of discovering what happened in history. History is an empirical study, and empiricism makes knowledge impossible. Did Christ die and rise? Was there ever a preacher in Palestine named Jesus? Can we discover anything he ever said or did. Historical investigation to determine these facts requires a study of documents. Are the documents genuine? Or not? Did Matthew copy Mark's mistakes? Was John written after AD 150? How shall opposing evidences be judged? Judge they must be. They must be balanced, the ones against the others. Newly discovered evidence changes the balance. Historical study therefore results in a series of approximations. And approximations lead to despair for no one ever gets to heaven by approximations.

There's a footnote on Martin Koehler here. Martin Koehler wrote a very brilliant thesis, whose title I forget of course. He lived, he wrote about 1890, and actually brought the life of Jesus movement to an end. The life of Jesus movement began with Bauer and what's-his-sidekick, Bauer and hmm? Who? Strauss. Yeah, that's right, Strauss and Bauer, went through say Renouir in France and came to an end with the fella who concluded Christ was insane. The fella who plays the organ. Schweitzer. He showed that Christ was insane. And that brought to an end the life of Jesus movement. But Koehler brings it to a philosophic end, not simply to an absurd conclusion. And, you ought to read that thing by Koehler to show that faith has nothing to do with history. And it's a very brilliant thesis. And of course it will help you understand the developments in American seminaries in the past 50 years.

It takes about 50 years for German scholarship to get over here to America. So Koehler became popular here oh in the late 30's. Certainly, well yeah I'd say in the late 30s or something like that. More popular, I suppose, after world war two. But he wrote about 1890 or 1898 or somewhere along there.

But approximations lead to despair. Scholarship never ends. Therefore the scholar can never decide. One can admire Ciceronian scholarship because it aims at nothing more than accuracy about Cicero. Here approximation is not embarrassing. But Biblical scholarship, used to establish the truth of historical events, claims to give eternal life. This, unlike Cicero, is a matter of infinite passion, and for infinite passion and eternal life, a single iota is of infinite importance.

And there's a footnote that questions whether the iota he is referring to is the letter which changes homoousios into homoiousios. I don't know whether that is so or not, it's just a guess on my part.

Suppose historical research proved the Bible true. Would this help anyone who did not have faith? No, for faith is not the result of scholarly inquiry. It does not bring a person one step closer to faith. Would such proof of the Biblical events help the person who already has faith? No, for several reasons. First, since he has faith, nothing further is needed. Second, research may actually harm him because objectivity tends to dissipate infinite passion. Then third, according to this supposition, the person would know the Bible is true, he would have knowledge and therefore he would have lost his faith. Faith requires passion and certainty excludes passion.

Faith does not need theology or scholarship for the same reason that a girl in love does not need to have a respectable boyfriend. And there's a footnote on that too.

At the start, one might have thought that Kierkegaard would be interested in history simple because Hegel was not. If there is no motion in the concept of motion, and no Hegel in the concept of Man, does it not follow that the absolute has no place for history? But by Kierkegaard's analysis, Hegel has too much history. Hegel identifies the truth with the unfolding of the absolute in history. This is fatal. In a long footnote, Kierkegaard ridicules Hegel. The latter's absolute system is not unchanging truth, it is chaotic skepticism. Since for Hegel, truth is a continuing world process, each stage is valid. I don't like the word valid there, but that was the word he used and so I use his words. The opinions of every age are true, at the moment. But

since history still continues, no thinker or culture has arrived at the final truth. What is true today will be false tomorrow. In Hegel everything is as relative as it was in Protagoras. The ridicule of this footnote does not depend on Kierkegaard's rejection of relativism, for him too, on the footnote on the following page, the infinite reflection which alone the concern of the subject for his eternal happiness can realize itself, has in general one distinguishing mark: the omnipresence of the dialectical.

That means you turn from one concept to another to an..an..another but unlike Hegel you never get to the end, as will be clear I guess in the following paragraph. Even the, this is still quotation isn't it, yeah, even the most fixed of things, an infinite negative resolve, the infinite form of God's presence in the individual at once becomes dialectical.

As soon as I take the dialectical away, I become superstitious. But it is far more comfortable to be objective and superstitious, and boastful about it, proclaiming the thoughtlessness as wisdom. Thus Kierkegaard is as dialectical, as relativistic, and as skeptical as he believes Hegel is. The ridicule consists in this: Hegel thought he was objective, Kierkegaard openly accepts irrationalism.