

EAST AND WEST: RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

The relationship between religion and philosophy has been one of the most important points of dispute between the east and the west .for a proper understanding of the relationship that

Exists or is established between these two ,it would be necessary to cover large ground the aim of any undertaking in this respect would be to clear the grounds of confusion in this paper I intend to survey the various views of western writers and also to point out that the eastern view in respect of the relationship is as much important as theirs.

At the very beginning , permit me to remark that there has not been any single view or unanimity between the various thinkers in the west about the nature of philosophy itself . Even the term does not seem to bear any identical connotation .this you will observe as I Present to you the most important of their views.

Jacques maritain in his introduction to philosophy [sheed and ward] says that philosophy is nothing other than wisdom itself in so far as it is accessible to human nature . it is not supernatural wisdom or superhuman illumination supernaturally infused into our souls. It is not a wisdom which is spontaneous and unconscious which we possess in virtue of a natural instinct. It is the wisdom of man as man which he acquires by the labour of his intellect gained with difficulty and held so insecurely. Philosophy is human wisdom and a philosopher is man and a philosopher is a man humanly wise.

Theology or Science of Religion is supernatural or Superhuman and illumination and the light of faith. Philosophy is a universal science through the natural light of reason. Religion is also universal through the grace of the Divine or Superhuman source. Theology judges Philosophy or philosophical conclusions. Philosophical sciences build their constructions with the help of self-evident premises, self-evident to reason. Theology constructs its universe with the help of the values and truths granted

by God. It regulates negatively the philosophical in so far as the philosophical seeks to transgress the human. It is perfectly autonomous within its sphere even as Philosophy is autonomous within its sphere. "Philosophy is subject to theology neither in its premises nor in its method but in its conclusions."

This appears to make a nice distinction between the sphere of reason and grants a kind of supremacy to revelation. This appears to be the general catholic view. But Rene Guenon in his recent work the Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines states that the metaphysical approach is the truly intellectual approach and the national approach is that of Philosophy. He points out that the 'Greek Miracle' consists in its substitution of rational for the intellectual conceptions and this entails an individuation of conceptions. It is indeed a substitution of the scientific or philosophical concepts and methods for the metaphysical point of view. We know that science deals with secondary causes rather than ultimate explanations and causes, which is the concern of Philosophy. But Philosophy even though it attempts to arrive at the universals only manages to get at general (common concepts). Religion is that which binds, i.e. it binds man to a superior principle or something that binds men to one another. True religion incorporates all other material also. If the religion is purely metaphysical it can seek the binding principle only in the Divine or the Universal. But in the West "religion essentially entails the conjunction of elements belonging to different orders, a dogma, a moral law, and a cult or forms of worship. Wherever one or other of these elements happens to be wanting there can be no longer any question of religion in the proper sense of the word. The first element forms the intellectual part of religion, the second its social portion, while the third which is the ritual element, participates in both these functions."

Further philosophy is the science of sciences or rather tries to generalize the methods and conclusions of the sciences that deal with the knowledge of individual things. Metaphysics is of the universal order, and of necessity beyond all the distinctions that condition the knowledge of individual things. Accordingly metaphysical truths can only be conceived by the use of a faculty that does not belong to the individual order namely intellect.

Thus we find that Rene Guenon makes a distinction between metaphysics and philosophy, which is of the order of physics. He also makes a distinction between the purely metaphysical order of reality and knowledge and the partial intellectual or metaphysical order namely, the religious. He considers that the purely metaphysical reality is of the universal and not subject to change. It is to adopt the Indian phrase, 'Sanatana' Religious knowledge is a mixture of the revelational or intellectual and the social-traditional and ethical. He further states that intellectual and the rational are different, one pertains to the knowledge of the generals and the other to the universals. He points out that the words 'general' and 'universal' have been the cause of ambiguity. So also he remarks that the terms 'individuality' and 'personality' have been wrongly used and in quite contradictory senses than what they originally meant. Religion seems of to have closer affinities with metaphysics rather than with philosophy, because the truths that it enfolds are truths that are intellectual and not arrived at by the process of reason, by the effort and labour of the individual.

Dean Inge in his contribution to the Contemporary British Philosophy (first series) writes that he is unable to distinguish between Religion and Philosophy. Religion however is a search for ultimate values, Philosophy is the search for ultimate causes. The search for values is something different from the search for truths as such. Religion belongs to the region of the practical and the values really are those which it is good to get. Philosophy is not merely an intellectual pursuit but a kind of priesthood, requiring a consecration of the whole life to the quest of the Holy Grail. It is thus not what Maritain considers to be an enquiry into ultimate causes with the help of the human reason only. But it may without the intervention or help of revelation arrive at ultimate values and causes. But it is something that has not occurred. Immortality can never be proved by reason. Indeed the so-called certainties of reason are all irrationally delivered. We do not prove the uniformity of nature. The existence of the laws of thought, such as identity and contradiction and excluded middle are all presumptions or assumptions which make our thought rationally ordered or systematic. Human reason is a frail thing. The best that can be said about it is that philosophy can and should undertake this task not because what it constructs is truth but because man must know in terms of his own

ability the nature of reality as much as he could. 'This is an impossible task but worth while'. Philosophy however as a rational construction rendered with great effort is a mechanical mode of doing. Nor should it be suggested that the mechanical mode is all and the right and proper nature of Human reason when it grants this mode or pattern at all. Thus Jacques Maritain's view is not so much a clear-cut way of deciding what philosophy is as what reason has been doing in the West, on the lines laid down by Aristotle and others. Whilst it is true that reason and revelation are different ways of knowing and the former is, the human whereas the latter is the divine method yet it is clear that the lines or distinction cannot be drawn except in an arbitrary way.

Nicolas Berdyaev, one of the most distinguished writer philosopher of this century, writes about the relationship between Religion and Philosophy as one of antagonism, because religion claims to possess in theology a cognitive expression, a field of knowledge.

¹ Vedanta shows that the Absolute is both the material and efficient cause of the Universe. It is only by means of Revelation we get this identity of both, Reason does not grant either its truth or possibility :

² Cf. Solitude and Society.

The problems posed and resolved by Philosophy are invariably the same as those propounded by theology. The philosopher's only defense against the attack made by theologians in the West was to show that revelation which is the basis of religion is not itself opposed to knowledge. There is correspondence between them: revelation is what is revealed to me and knowledge is what I discover myself. The conflict then between philosophy and religion must be traced to other causes than the content as such. "The Divine Revelation, which is the pure and original essence of religion, becomes adulterated by the immediate reaction of the human community in which it takes place, and by which men make use of it to further their own interests". Berdyaev also holds that "there is no essential affinity between revelation and knowledge, since the former contains no cognitive element. It only becomes a part of

knowledge by virtue of what man contributes to it, by virtue of his thought, for theology as well as philosophy, are purely human acts of knowledge”.

Berdyaev considers that, intuition is the basis or *sine qua non* of philosophy. Philosophical intuition cannot be deduced from anything else; it is primary, and secretes in itself the light which illuminates every act of knowledge. Neither religious nor scientific truths are adequate substitutes for intuition. Philosophy “discovers its ontological foundation in the depths of its own Being, in its intimacy of its own existence; it adapts itself to the philosopher’s belief or skepticism; it varies with his belief as the consciousness expands or contracts. But revelation transforms it”. Further he writes “In the conflict between Religion and Philosophy truth is on the side of religion when philosophy claims to replace it in the sphere of salvation and eternal life; but truth is on the side of philosophy when it claims to attain a higher degree of knowledge incorporated in religion”. In this sense philosophy helps purify religion “by protecting it against the objective and natural processes assailing religious truths”.

Thus Nicolas Berdyaev makes a clear distinction between intuitions and revelations, intuitions being apprehensions made by the individual, the existential subject, and the revelations being deliverances from God, exposures of the ultimate Being within the existential subject, on the ultimate Being; philosophic intuitions are therefore of a different kind from the revelational or spiritual. The religious consciousness or conscience is an admixture of the revelational with the objectifications, becoming so much adulterated though appearing as an objective unity known by the name of cult or culture.

Berdyaev seems to agree with Rene Guenon in respect of the pure status of the spiritual as metaphysical truth. But with a greater clarity than what had been so far presented by western writers he shows that this metaphysical is spiritual and existential that is falling more on the side of the subject and that it is universal truth. He also clearly distinguishes between the universal which can be individual and perhaps is always individual and the general idea, which is a pseudo universal, an objectification rendered useful for practical purposes by reason.

Berdyev also points out that Modern Philosophy is distinguished from Ancient Western Philosophy including the medieval, by the fact of its radical separation of the objective from the subjective making the subjective the real existence. It is to Des Cartes we owe the first formulation of the Cogito as proof of the Sum. At the hands of the great Germans, Kant and Fichte, it became more pronounced. At Hegel's hands there was an attempt to make the objective the subject, the objectification of Spirit for Hegel is the World or Universe. But then the clear distinction between the individual subject and the objectification as also Universal Being which are the three polarities of the Being within its depths, are made to appear as if working in terms of contradiction.

I have taken the most clearly expressed statement of the representative writers on philosophy. The study of the writings of other philosophers only goes to confirm the fact that religion is supernatural whereas philosophy is natural or human. Further these two worlds of experience are somehow related to one another. There is absolute autonomy of reason within its own jurisdiction even as revelation has its own jurisdiction. Any transgressions on either part or faculty would result in confusion. There can be no gap between these two spheres except perhaps border disputes. The division is exhaustive. But then this is not quite the view accepted by certain writers. They wish to emphasise that the points of view differ between reason and revelation (religion), though the domain surveyed is the same. Thus philosophy is not content to have knowledge of only the rational parts of the universe. On the other hand it claims to explain or construct a system of the whole Reality. Its formal pattern is what it in effect seeks to lay down by means of its reason. By this construction of the formal nature of reality, it makes reality amenable to the individual as rational, it makes reality amenable to the individual as rational. Religion is not concerned with this formal nature of Reality. It is more concerned with action in respect of the Reality. It is "the personal relationship that gets established between the individual and the Reality directly without the medium of any reason". It is the total reaction to the Reality, which is apprehended in some fashion as the whole of which the individual is a part. "Religion reveals to man that he needs God. And to know the need of God is to find him and to

find God is to find what secures every final value.” But the most important characteristic of religion is to offer ‘a radical resistance to limitation.’

If Philosophy offers a radical resistance to limitation in the sphere of ignorance religion offers a radical resistance to limitation in the sphere of action. Ethics becomes thus a necessary stage in the evolution of the religious action. Ethics is a science of conduct within the ambit of particular actions or finite Will, whereas Religion is the science of conduct in respect of the totality or the Whole conceived as the Whole.

So from the point of Western Philosophical conception we can say that there is no fixed standpoint taken as regards the relationship between Philosophy and Religion. Further the growth of western theology in recent times has been of a peculiar kind. The aspiration to interpret theology and philosophy so as to be acceptable to all is a legitimate aspiration. This undoubtedly hastens the unification of all kinds of speculation whilst smoothing out differences. The tendency to seek good points of other philosophies and religions in one’s own religion and philosophy is another matter. It is good for the purpose of taking legitimate pride in one’s own inherited religion and philosophy and as a rule, to foster pride may be good for the individuals concerned. But it is quite a different matter when the facts have to be clearly faced.

All persons are not endowed with the philosophic spirit of reasoning that seeks the knowledge of reality as rationally constructed unity. Philosophy as the science of knowledge of Reality is tattva darsana. The limitation of such enquiries must only be in respect of knowledge and one should not mix it up with other factors. The metaphysics of Reality is the aim of knowledge. All instruments of knowledge must be devoted to this one aim of knowledge. All other instruments must strictly be limited to the spheres wherein they could effectively function. If this be the truth of the pramanas or instruments of apprehension of knowledge, as Indian Philosophy states it then all that we gain through these must be considered to be rational. The question of the arrangement or grades of reality is a secondary matter, and must depend upon the capacity of the instruments of knowledge alone, whether they could grant full

knowledge of the individual to integrate, as best as he can with the principles that are to him self-evident.

The fact that we cannot make perception rational does not make perception itself irrational. So also revelational knowledge cannot be irrational. The irrationality that is qualified of these experiences is of a different kind and yet they are not irrational in the sense of being contra-rational. The avenues of knowledge are all acceptable, must be accepted if our knowledge should have at least the quality of integrality. It is also true that there is a process of unification of our spheres of knowledge whether we like it or not, and this despite the fact that we clearly keep the different kinds of knowledge independent for all practical purposes. Thus Indian thought or philosophy recognizes its function to be to integrate all types of experience to form a synthesis or samanvaya is possible. This samanvaya is necessary and in each domain of experience, pratyaksa, anumana and sabda. The Vedanta is the complete coherent account of the Reality which is arrived at srutis.

Indian thought makes darsana, a metaphysical approach to reality, rather than a philosophical approach as such, if we mean by philosophy the narrow methodology of a rational attempt to understand human experience. In one sense all experience that falls within the ambit or field of human comprehension is human experience. But there are degrees of this apprehension and of this influx of knowledge. Indian thought as darsana makes a super-inferential or super-perceptual approach to the problems of Reality. And in this Reality it finds not only the satisfaction of its knowledge –incentive but also the ultimate incentives the liberty-consciousness and delight-consciousness. It is not merely the cognitive, conative and effective factors of the individual consciousness that find their satisfaction in the Absolute for these factors of our personality are extraverted and objectifications of subjective consciousness. It is the aim of Metaphysics in Indian Darsana to grant the ultimate values of Being in the depths of the individual consciousness. There are thus three fundamental truths, the Absolute God or Brahman, the soul or the seeker after liberation and knowledge and Nature the objectified existence, which whilst obstructing the knowledge of being in its own nature yet it reveals that has its roots in the Being or the Absolute but in a reversed manner or

occult way. To understand that too it is open to the soul, but only from within itself. This is antardarsana, the seeing of the Absolute in the heart. This inner movement or subjectification of consciousness yields at first a clear nature of the processes that had resulted in the soul from objectification or extraverted movements of mind. This enquiry into the nature of the self is not governed by the principles of inference as such though there is doubtless the steady and unflagging search for the ultimate Ground of Existence. If this is not philosophical search what it is we may well ask? Rene Guenon rightly states that if Indian Philosophy has properly to be interpreted, it has to be interpreted from the metaphysical standpoint, or the purely 'intellectual' point of view rather than from the 'rational' or the pseudo-universal point of view. All the doctrines of the Hindus accordingly claim their sanction and reality and worth only because of the metaphysical realization. The Hindu darsanas also have to be understood from the metaphysical standpoint rather than from the sensist and rational points of view. It is however a pity that this process of sensist and rational interpretation began rather early even in India and continued to be indulged in all the systems except perhaps the Vedantas. Philosophy or Tattvadarsana really means not merely human knowledge but knowledge that is granted to the individual human being and which by a process of interpenetrative understanding leads us to the ultimate consciousness aimed at by the human soul. Dharma however as Religion applies to the individual's behaviour or conduct and holds a place analogous to ethical life. But this is not the only emphasis of the spiritual consciousness. The religious consciousness is not identical with the ethical conscience; it is something much more than that. It is aware not only of the transcendent aim or purpose of Being or rather the transcendent supra-temporal and supra-spatial reality of Being and its Law on the one hand but also of the manner in which that Being becomes or manifests itself within the patterns of space and time and causality. Immortality is the aim of the search, fearlessness too within the world, and a consciousness of all planes of being, both physical and supra-physical, vital and supra-vital, mental, and supramental, mortal as well as the immortal. And equally there should be the recognition of the world or universe of being vaster and more than any that one knows and aspires to know. Our obligations accordingly are to all planes of existence; within the depths of our own being we are to

recognize the transcendental oneness of all things in the Divine. This depth of consciousness in which we live and be which we grow or attain happiness is the Heart-consciousness or love, which is said to be a transcendental or metaphysical category.

Thus dharma and darsana are closely interwoven. The spheres of philosophy and religion are distinguishable and are necessary to each other. But the force but which they are interfused is not that of either but that of the mystical metaphysical consciousness that of the is a product of Divine revelation or opening out or pouring down of the higher type of knowledge. This is the atma- darsana or Brahmasampatti which is more of a gift from the metaphysical Being rather than a result of aspiration, since, all aspiration, however satvika or pure is ego-centred and cannot get released from that 'closedness' of its being. Service and the habit of pursuing unity through satya and dharma which are philosophical aspirations may prepare the conditions of inner revelation of the 'opening of the lid that covers Truth'

Dharma is something more than Religion just as metaphysics is more than 'human wisdom' or 'human construction of the reality' or 'intellectual construction that is intelligible to the human mentality'. Just as Indian Thought considers that human thought can have direct access to 'knowledge or wisdom' even by leading the intellect of man to higher perceptions (upamanas) or measures than those open to the mental or fragmenting consciousness, or the ignorance, even so dharma transcends the limits of particular religions or their practices. Dharma adapted to local or social conditions may be of different orders or kinds,. But then the one primary condition that makes all these rites, dharma or true or rtam, is that they reveal or clearly and unmistakably reveal or manifest or exhibit in the mystical metaphysical truth that liberates thought and feeling and grants inward peace and plenitude. For that is the incentive of the individual, a creative incentive as Berdyaev puts it most aptly.

Purnatva is the hope and the fulfillment proposed by the Veda or knowledge. The real trouble is that most religious persons are more socialized than liberated or illumined by the fundamental perennial light of Wisdom, the Eternal, the *Saccidananda*.

All conflicts belong to the external and the sentimental not to the cardinal and the eternal and the metaphysical Truth. Thus Spiritual religion is of a higher order than the social religion which was remarked, more than one in the history of mankind in the East as well as in the West, as 'closed', 'opiate'. 'Ignorance'. That is the reason why Indian Thought had from the beginning of its history always sought to find its basis in the truly Metaphysical or paratattva-darsana, the Vedanta to which all the other systems tend, which is the firmest synthesis of all perspectives, but regulated by the truly universal Wisdom, the Knowledge of the one which makes life a consecration, a righteous one and a full one, and a liberated one.