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Final Examination Answers, Personalism

January 1952
[Boston, Mass.]

In his final examination answers for DeWolf's course on personalism, King suggests that "the most serious criticism of personalism is in the area of the mind-body problem." He praises DeWolf's "double aspect theory" as an "important and brilliant attempt to solve this pressing problem." King also asserts that "one of the most important problems confronted by present personalists is that of the relationship between Personalism and theology." DeWolf awarded King a 93 for the examination and an A for the course.

I. Relationship between Lotze and Bowne.¹

1. Similarities:

- (a) Both Lotze and Bowne held that personality was the clue to the problems of philosophy. It can be explained (i.e. personality) by nothing else, but everything else can be explained by it. They both agree that the antinomies of identity and change, the One and the many can be solved in personality.
- (b) Both Lotze and Bowne were theist. They held that theism was the only metaphysical framework that could give epistemology a rational grounding. Moreover, theism for them is the only theory that can account for interaction. We might state at this point, however, that Lotze used an argument to establish the existence of God which was never found in Bowne. Lotze set forth a sort of revised ontological argument.
- (c) Both Lotze and Bowne saw some validity in mechanism. Bowne spoke of a mechanism expressive of purpose. However Lotze went beyond Bowne at this point. He held that all life converges in mechanistic forces, and that the only difference in life matter and organic was that of arrangement. Lotze probably placed more emphasis on mechanism than any other personalist.

2. Dissimilarities

- (a) Bowne and Lotze were at somewhat opposing poles on the doctrine of freedom. Lotze was quite vague at this point, and certainly he never affirmed its validity emphatically. On the other hand, however, Bowne was the forthright champion of freedom. He affirmed that without it both ~~kn~~ reason and morality would go shipwreck. This was probably Bowne's most characteristic emphasis. For him freedom had both metaphysical and epistemological significance.

1. King refers to Rudolf Hermann Lotze (1817-1881) and Borden Parker Bowne (1847-1910).

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- (b) Lotze is also not as emphatic on the doctrine of immortality as is Bowne. He remains vague at this point, while Bowne is very explicit in affirming its reality.
- (c) Bowne also deviated from the panpsychism which was set forth by Lotze. He was more of an occasionalist. Moreover, he placed more emphasis on pluralism, while Lotze was more of a radical monist because of his panpsychistic emphasis.²

II. The chief modification that Brightman has brought about to the personalistic philosophy of Bowne is that of method. Bowne's method adhered more or less to the Aristotelian-Kantian tradition of reason which defined reason as an ~~principle~~ a priori principle. Brightman on the contrary falls in line with the Platonic-Hegelian tradition which defines reason as a principle of coherence. So that Brightman's method places more emphasis on coherence than did Bowne's. Brightman's method may be called rational empiricism. In this method emphasis is placed on analysis, but Brightman insist that there must be a post analytic synopsis.

Brightman is quite critical of Bowne's oft quoted phrase that "life is deeper than logic." On the one hand he admits that this is a superfluous truism in the sense that life is more than logic, but on the other hand he sees it as being an injurious philosophical emphasis. According to Brightman, if this view was followed to its logical conclusion there would be no way to distinguish between truth and a mere illusion. For Brightman "truth is the whole." He learned his logic from Hegel.

Brightman also modified Bowne's personalistic system by positing a finite God. Bowne was in every sense of the word a theistic absolutist. Brightman, on the other hand is a theistic finitist. For him God is a struggling God. His God is a conscious Person who eternally finds and controls "the Given" in every moment of his experience. His will didn't create this "Given" but it has to work with it. This fact accounts for God's limitation. His power is finite, and his goodness infinite.³

III. Personalism differs from absolute idealism in being a quantitative pluralism. Absolute idealism is monistic, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Closely related to this difference is the difference in epistemology. Personalism stresses epistemological dualism while absolute idealism stresses epistemological monism. For the "typical" Personalist the thing series and the thought series are numerical two rather than one.

The relative strength of absolute idealism at this point is that it satisfies the mind's demand for unity. Moreover, it gives an easy explanation of interaction. But there is a point at which this relative strength becomes an absolute weakness, namely in explaining error and the problem of evil. Certain arguments have been set forth by this school of thought

2. King received 9 points for this answer.

3. King received 8+ points.

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stating that evil is incomplete good and when seen in terms of the whole it is really good. The same would apply for error. But one could readily answer that the whole is never perceived by anyone at anytime, so how is it possible to know that evil is incomplete good. Someone could just as well say that good is incomplete evil.

Certainly Personalism has a much stronger ground to stand on at this point. With an epistemic dualism error and evil can be explained without attributing it to the Absolute. Moreover, creation can be a real factor with the personalist, but not so with the Absolute idealist.

If morality is to be rational and worship real there must be a separation between God and man. Metaphysical otherness is a necessity for God and man if morality, worship and reason are to be meaningful⁴

IV. I think that the most serious criticism of personalism is in the area of the mind-body problem. Personalism, according to many, has failed to give an adequate explanation of this important problem. There have been several explanation in the history of philosophy of this problem, among them being, illusionism, interactionism, and epiphenomenalism. Personalists, on the whole, have accepted the interaction explanation. Recently professor DeWolf has attempted to deal with the problem in terms of a double aspect theory. In this theory it is argued that the person as it is in and for itself is a conscious person, but the person as observed by others is system of orderly processes. Such a view might be a "Conciliation of Personalism and Behaviorism." Indeed it is an important and brilliant attempt to solve this pressing problem.

Certainly Behaviorist and other physiological psychologist have revealed the profundity of this problem. It is now up to the personalist to confront it.⁵

V. To my mind one of the most important problems confronted by present personalists is that of the relationship between Personalism and theology. This problem grows up mainly because of the emphasis, by many personalist, on the method of coherence. The problem boils down to this: Can one hold to an empirical method of coherence and at the same time make absolute decisions? Certainly religion demands such absolute decisions.

As for me, I have found a solution of this problem in the thought of men like Karl Gross, Brightman and Hocking. Theoretically we can never make a claim to absolute certainty. This is certainly the emphasis of a method of coherence and that I accept. But while we cannot be theoretically certain about any issue, we are compelled to act. And certainly we have a right to act and accept any belief until one better is found if it does not contradict experience. So that along with a "theo-

4. King received 10 points.

5. King received 10 points.

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retical relativism," we ~~are perfectly~~ have the perfect right to adopt a "practical absolutism."⁶ 15 Jan
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6. King received 9 points.