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A table of contents for *Review & Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_rande_01.php

THE EXISTENCE OF GOD: A STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS.*

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I. INTRODUCTION.

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1. *Statement and definition of the subject.* We shall undertake a study of the Religious Consciousness. It would have been my choice to treat this phase of consciousness at large; but the time limitations of the lectureship do not permit the consideration of so inclusive a subject. I have elected, therefore, to restrict our study to the implications of the Religious Consciousness in respect of the Existence of God. As a consequence, the subject of these lectures may be stated thus: The Existence of God; A Study of the Religious Consciousness. Each part of this dual title is definitive of the other. We shall approach the doctrine of the Existence of God by way of the Religious Consciousness; and our study of the Religious Consciousness is with a view to discovering whether Philosophy justifies us in holding that the Ground of Being and Activity, and thus of all Reality, is the self-subsistent One, self-conscious, self-determined, and good.

The above indicates our purpose in general terms; it will be well, however, to give it more exact definition. We do not seek the establishment or the defense of the Christian doctrine of God. Ours is a philosophical, not a theological, study. We do not undertake to render either a constructive or an apologetic service to Christian Theology. If our study should prove to be constructive or defensive of Christian truth, we believe that it will have all the more cogency from the fact that such a conclusion is not purposed. The teacher of Philosophy may not

*Norton Lectures for 1914-15.

function directly as a theologian or an apologist; he may not set out to establish any thesis, for in so doing he breaks through his limitations and reduces the value of his contribution. He is always an investigator and only an investigator; he is restricted to reporting what he finds. The student of Philosophy is an uncommitted student of experience. He may be the proponent of a system of thought; but he must not be its thick and thin advocate. In a word, he may not hold a brief for any doctrine, scientific, philosophical, or theological.

2. *Point of view and purpose.* The reason for this limitation of the philosophical investigator is not far to seek. We have a hunger for truth, a hunger that can be satisfied only by what we take to be truth. If we should grant that the primary, possibly also the latest, stage of this desire is not a longing for mere intellectual, or mere theoretical, satisfaction, and that it has its origin in a valuation of truth for practical ends, still the fact remains that we seek truth. We have vision of truth only as we have vision of reality; and to have rational seizure of reality, is to have truth. A statement of truth is a statement of what reality is within the limitations of a certain relation; it is the rational equivalent of an aspect of reality. To apprehend a truth is to apprehend some phase of reality. To come into commerce with the ground of all that is, *i. e.*, with the ultimate reality, would be to come into commerce with the fountain of truth. Now, there is only one place where one can meet reality and know it. That place for you is your individual consciousness, for it is there that you and the universe come together. Your universe, the universe as known to you and realized by you, is your experience. The external world, to be sure, exists apart from you; but its significance to you, what it presents of reality that has become yours, is in your consciousness; it is stored up in your experience. Hence the Philosopher makes a critical study of experience in order to discover the nature of reality, the nature of man and the universe. He goes to experience because

experience is a reality, and it is only in experience that our own reality and the realities of the universe reveal themselves to us. To state it otherwise, the ground and the order of the universe are revealed in experience; experience, therefore, is the subject-matter of Philosophy. That is, experience is for Philosophy what plants are for botany, the cell for biology, and language for philology.

In order to avoid possible misunderstanding, I define more particularly what we mean by saying that experience is the subject-matter of Philosophy. The philosophic material furnished by experience does not consist primarily of the contents of consciousness. It is not what we know or how we feel or what we purpose; neither is it the objects of which we have knowledge, or concerning which we have feeling, or with respect to which we determine our activity. These are contents of consciousness; and the subject-matter of Philosophy is primarily, not the content of consciousness, but experience *as such*, experience itself as that in which the conscious life of the subject is constituted. The great fact for Philosophy is that we have experience, that we come into conscious relation with what is other than self, that we know ourselves and the world, that we value objects and events, that we handle things and conduct affairs and determine our own activity, and that the self of each of us comes to realization in and through experience. This is the fontal fact of Philosophy. Philosophy studies experience as a fact common to all men; it does not deal with your individual experience or mine, except as our individual experience has community of nature with the experience of the race, or as it reveals what is essential to human experience.

Since experience is the subject-matter of Philosophy, he who philosophizes must take experience as he finds it; he must not make it over or transform it in any particular or degree. He must study critically the report which experience makes of itself, and by such study he must determine the significance of experience. It follows from

this that it is not the primary object of Philosophy to create belief. As a result of reflective activity beliefs will develop; but it is not the peculiar province of Philosophy to create beliefs or to defend them. It is rather its function to examine beliefs held, especially beliefs common to the experience of men, and to determine whether and how far they are in harmony with the whole of reality.

Philosophy must also keep in mind the fact that experience is an organic reality, a unitary whole. The parts of an organic reality—e. g., the members of the body—cannot be adequately studied except we relate them to the whole organism. Inasmuch, then, as experience is an organic reality, any phase of consciousness—as individual, social, moral, or religious consciousness—is incomplete by itself, and its full explanation requires that it be related to experience as a whole. In this connection, we also note the fact that reflective thought has suffered from an inadequate conception of rationality; it has been too generally taken to be synonymous with mere intellection. There is no mere intellection. As rational, man is not only intellective, but he has feeling, or affection, and he is conative—*i. e.*, he desires and wills. A whole experience is intellective, affective, and conative. All these phases are essential alike to experience and to rational activity.

The philosophical investigator may not accept any conclusion or view as true unless rationality certifies to it. The course of Mediæval Philosophy made that certain. And rationality will not certify to any view unless it appears to accord with the totality of experience. If it be found, however, that any belief is in harmony with the whole of experience and with a rational construction of man and the universe, continued acceptance of it is philosophically justified. It is not only justified, but, by so much as rationality is self-consistent and the universe is coherent, it would be irrational to refuse to accept it. We cannot enter upon the study of the universe without assuming its rationality, and hence its coherence and or-

derliness; and the response which the universe has given to our inquiries sustains this assumption. The universe is coherent and orderly. Since man is in and of the universe, the coherence of the universe involves that what is necessary to give value to personality and the life of personality has rational claim to acceptance as real. It must be in and of the order of the universe, or the life of personality would not only be valueless but incoherent with the universe in which that life has its being and of which it is a part. And that is why we insist that rationality, in the wider significance already indicated, requires us to accept that as true which is in harmony with the whole of experience and which makes for the highest valuation of personality.

In anthropological studies, there has been a tendency to give primacy to characteristics which are common to men in all stages of development; and good reason can be assigned by this science for so doing. This scientific method has led, however, to the ignoring or undervaluing of the characteristics of experience which are present in the highest stages of human development. We do not go to the sprouting acorn to discover the characteristics of the oak, nor to the embryo to learn what are the characteristics of the human body, nor to the earliest indications of consciousness in a child to determine what rationality is. These lower stages are of interest, and they present material of value to the student. In the case of the child, they reveal rudimentary rational activity; but the most highly developed rational activity gives significance to the earlier stages, and they set forth more inclusively and definitely what man is. The forms in which the Religious Consciousness manifests itself in the lower stages of man's development, have scientific value; but their testimony as to what this phase of consciousness is, is neither so full, so definite, nor so revelatory as that of the most advanced stages of experience. We do not get the meaning of endings by studying beginnings; in the philosophical method, we discover the sig-

nificance of beginnings in the endings. We find man in highly civilized man rather than in primitive man. In view of this we shall apply the following principle in our study: The most advanced stage in any development gives the fullest and, therefore, the most significant expression of the developing reality.

What we have said thus far will indicate the purpose and the point of view of these lectures. It indicates also the place we shall give to the phase of experience which we are especially to consider, viz., the Religious Consciousness. It likewise suggests our attitude toward the doctrine of the Existence of God. Belief in the existence of God did not originate through formal proof that He is; it is not a product of reflection upon the world-order; it antedates both systematic reflective thought and proof. From the beginning, philosophic thought has been confronted by the Religious Consciousness and its faith, in the lower stages, in many gods; and by its movement in the higher stages, toward unification of its conception of the divine in one God. Belief in God, as a superior reality with which we are intimately related, has the field of thought and persists in claiming the most serious consideration. Our question is as to whether a critical study of experience will help us to determine the rationality or irrationality of this belief; and for this study we take our standpoint within the Religious Consciousness.

II. CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE RELIGIOUS CONSCIOUSNESS.

1. *The Individual Consciousness.* The Plain Man is certain that he is and that there is an external world of persons and things and occurrences. In his sane moments he never doubts the reality of himself or of the external world of things and other persons and happenings. Reflective thought justifies this "common-sense" assurance.

At first view, our consciousness seems to set each of us, as an individual, over against the external world and

separate from it. A man tends to think of himself as completely individual, as having a complete self hood in himself and of himself; and he regards the world as apart from him and entirely independent of him. Reflection, however, makes the falsity of this conception apparent. We are connected with the world of things through our body; and our body is of like nature with the things of the world and is dependent upon them for its being. This fact negatives our assumed apartness and independence.

Idealism—which I regard as the true Philosophy—insists upon a yet more significant dependence. This more significant dependence is revealed in our consciousness of ourselves and of the particulars of the external world. This consciousness is, of course, possible only because the perceived external objects are actually existent. That we are for ourselves what the content of our consciousness is, and that we are dependent upon the external world, at least in part, for that content of consciousness, may not be rationally questioned. It is just as true, however, that consciousness is possible only in and through consciousness of what is other than self. To know an object it is necessary to distinguish it from what is not it; that is, one cannot be conscious of himself except as he is also conscious of what is other than himself. In other words, one is dependent upon consciousness of the reality of the world, and thus upon the world, for consciousness of self. But self-consciousness is essential to our rationality, and hence to our being. As a consequence, our consciousness of the seeming apartness of the world and ourselves and our self-consciousness are due to the fact that we and the world are not wholly apart from and independent of each other. If I were apart from and independent of the world, as I naively thought before reflection, if I were in all respects “an other” as to the world, I had never known either the world or myself. The world of each of us is “our other,” “our complementary other” without which we could not be; or if we—assuming the impossible—could be without the world, we could not know that we

were. The world of each of us, then, is "our other," not merely in respect of our being physically dependent upon it for being and for content of consciousness, and thus for consciousness itself; but our capacity for knowing other persons and things and for apprehending occurrences is not an independent self-sustaining attribute. The capacity for knowing, which is potential at birth, becomes actual in and through our intercourse with the external world. It is in and with our knowing the world about us that self-consciousness, an essential element of human individuality, arises. Our personality, our irreplaceable individuality, has its roots, then, not in our separateness from the world of the not-self, but in the principal* oneness of the world and ourselves. That is, the individual subject and the world are rooted in a common principle.†

2. *The Social Consciousness.* We now pass to a consideration of a more significant reality, to a phase of consciousness which must be recognized if we would understand our individual consciousness. No man is a complete one, even as to his private personal consciousness; he is, as Plato said, "one of many." Your consciousness, which quite naturally appears to you to be so entirely your own, is a consciousness in which you partake with others, and others with you. Your attitude toward life and its experiences, your conception of right

*Principal. This word is marked "obsolete" in our dictionaries; nevertheless, I use it because it says just what I wish to say in this connection. It takes its meaning from the primary meaning of *principium*—origin, or source. My thought is that we and the world have a common ground, that our consciousness of self and of the external world implicates the oneness of ground of subject and object.

†Principle. This word is usually taken to mean a fundamental truth; but it primarily signifies, not a fundamental truth, but a reality which is the source or origin, the ground or permanent cause, of that of which it is the principle. The connection will indicate in most instances, where this term occurs, that I have in mind a fundamental reality, not a fundamental truth.

and wrong, your speech—through which your thinking is mediated—all come of your participation with others in an experience which is common to you and them. But your attitude toward life and its experiences, your accepted moral principles, and your thought are expressions of your real self; and in no section or moment of them are you wholly isolated from others. As a matter of fact, the isolated individual consciousness and self are not actual; they are mere abstractions. Yet some have spoken of the actual individual self as imperviable, as having a wholly private experience. Their thought is that each of us has in his own individual consciousness a world which is entirely his own, in which he lives quite by himself. This is a serious misconception of consciousness. The consciousness of each of us has its being in a whole of consciousness which we may denominate "The Social Consciousness," and it derives its essential characteristics from our participation with others in this common consciousness.

The self which they describe who regard the individual as the real self, is torn away from the source of our conscious self, *as a self and not a thing*. The answer which experience gives to the question as to how we come to know ourselves to be selves and other than things, makes this evident. The child at first regards things as much the same with himself as thinking, feeling, and willing; and he so treats them. That is, he takes them to be of a kind with himself, to be participants with him in experience. Later, he distinguishes between them and persons, and he comes to regard them as different in kind from himself. Along with the development in thought of this distinction, there develops the distinction of persons from things; and he ranks himself with persons. He and persons are for him of a kind; he and others are co-participants in experience. Persons are his fellows; he is a *socius* of others, and others are his *socii*. It is our cognized participation with others in experience, *i. e.*, the apprehended sociality of consciousness, that is

the ground of our knowledge that we are persons. Our consciousness of ourselves as selves is, therefore, from the beginning a social consciousness. All our activities and our thought respecting our activities are in some way connected with other persons. The language in which our thought is mediated is an expression of the social consciousness; and its availability for intercourse is limited by fellowship in consciousness. An American who has acquired the French language, can understand one who is speaking French, because he and the person speaking have had sufficient fellowship in experience. Consciousness must be social that it may have the characteristics which we find in individual consciousness; and there must be individual consciousness that there may be social consciousness, for the only consciousness possible to society is a composite of that of the individuals of whom society is composed. Our social self—our consciousness that others are of our kind and are fellow-participants with us in experience—is the center of all our experience. In a word, our consciousness is constituted in the social organism, and the social organism is a factor in the constituting of it.

3. *The Moral Consciousness.* The next stage of our thought connects it with certain concepts: "right," "good," "obligation." These concepts introduce us to the moral consciousness, and this arises in the social consciousness. The society in which we grew up insisted that we should condition our actions by always seeking to be "right" and doing what is "good." We were taught that the rights of others set bounds beyond which we should not attempt to pass; that there were for some persons provinces of privilege which were closed to us because we were not of their kind—as that "grown-ups" might do what children should not, or the teacher what the pupil might not; to make it general, that we were under obligation to seek the good and do the right. Thus our ethical sense developed in our social relations, in our recognition of these relations and of what is involved in

our being members of the social organism. The individual is held to owe it to society so to order his activities as to aid in the conservation of the social organism and in the advancement of its interests; and this requires that his ethical judgments shall accord with those of society, and that his conduct shall not contravene social ethical principles. From this there follows the obligation to develop the social virtues—e. g., truthfulness and justice; for falsehood and injustice would destroy the social organism, and truthfulness and justice promote the interests of society.

But the social organism is not fully developed; its members are not perfectly moral. Hence conflicts arise between the interests of society, as judged by society, and the individual's conception of his own interests. The fact that there are such conflicts indicates that neither society nor the social organism is ultimate. By so much as the universe is orderly and thus coherent, there must be an order that transcends† that which is expressed in the social consciousness; there must be an order in which the seeming conflict of social and individual interests is resolved. If there were no such order, we would have an unavoidable and irresolvable incoherence. We have found that the individual and the world are rooted in a

†Transcendence and Immanence. Take the case of a man who originates a business enterprise and carries it on. He transcends that business and is at the same time immanent in it. The business is not complete in itself; it is dependent upon him for its beginning and its continued being, and it cannot be explained apart from him. His immanence in it gives it its being and activity; and it finds its completion and its explanation in him. The immanence of the business man in his business does not make him numerically one with the business; he retains his individuality, and the business is an individual object other than the man. What is true of transcending and transcended reality, is also true of a transcending and transcended law; e. g., the law of gravitation as transcending the law of falling bodies. There is no transcendence apart from immanence, and no immanence apart from a transcendent. What transcends, comes to expression in what it transcends; what is transcended derives its being from, and finds its completion and explanation in, the transcendent.

common principle, of which both the world and the individual are expressions. We have also found that their ideal development is secured only through their ideal identification with this principle, which transcends both of them. So are society and the individual rooted in a common transcending principle. Since we are in a universe and not a multiverse, the experienced contradiction between the individual and the social conception of interests must be resolved in the ground of both. Either this, we repeat, or we have here an irreconcilable opposition and an incoherent, *i. e.*, an irrational, universe; the latter is unthinkable. The recognition of an ethical principle which transcends both the social and the individual consciousness, is essential to a rational conception of the community in nature of society and the individual.

4. *The Religious Consciousness the Transcendent Principle of the Moral Consciousness.* In the religious consciousness we find a principle recognized, in which the conflicts of the individual and the social ethical consciousness are resolved. The religious consciousness transcends the social consciousness and is its proximate ground. A transcendent principle includes what it transcends and is immanent in it; and what is transcended derives its being from, and finds its full explanation in, what transcends it. From this it would follow that the moral consciousness derives its life from, and finds its explanation in, the religious consciousness or the ground principle of the religious consciousness. It would be interesting to trace in detail the relation of morality to religion; but there is insufficient time for that, and it is not essential to our purpose. Two suggestions must suffice.

The concept "right" takes us beyond the social consciousness. Rightness does not consist in conformity to an external standard or in the formal ordering of conduct in keeping with an authoritative word. A man is right insofar as he is ethically at one with the norm of personality, insofar as he freely wills in conformity with

the norm. The ethical norm for man must be a personality of whose nature "right" is an expression. The mere social consciousness does not present such a norm, neither can it; but in the religious consciousness man regards himself as related to his norm. This is peculiarly true of monotheism.

Further, men deem themselves under obligation to observe the social ethical conventions. Nevertheless, it occurs not seldom that individuals who keenly feel such obligation oppose the will of society and claim that they are right in so doing; they insist that their obligation to be and do the "right" impels them to such opposition, that they are not morally free to follow the social rule. In justification of their opposition, they plead a law which, they say, overrules the social judgment as to what is right. Such claims have increased in frequency and variety with the ascent of man from the more primitive stages; and the recognition of an unconditioned authority which transcends the social law, has become more and more marked as the race has advanced. This opposition by individuals to the ethical conventions of their time and place has been a potent factor in the development of political and religious liberty and the elevation of ethical standards. In this refusal to accept social ethical deliverances as final and obligatory, there is recognition of an ultra-social ethical principle. The religious consciousness derives its life from belief in the reality of such a principle. This principle has been individualized—in the more advanced religions it has been personalized—in the object of worship, *i. e.*, in what the religious consciousness of the individual worshiper holds to be the source of the highest ethical law.

5. *Implications of what we have discovered.* We concluded that the seeming opposition of subject and object is simply the apprehension of two realities which are complementary. Being complementary, they are not opposed, but are essential to each other. Their separateness and apparent independence are reconciled with their

actual inter-dependence through their being rooted in a common principle of which they are distinguishable, but complementary, expressions. We also concluded that the individual personalities in the world are at root not separate, but have community of consciousness; and this community in consciousness is the proximate ground of the social organism. Ethical consciousness is developed in the development of the social consciousness; and this consciousness finds expression in the concepts "right" and "good" and "obligation." For the explanation of these concepts we must pass beyond the social organism. They imply authority and a norm; and the norm must, in the nature of the case, be personal. The worshiped object of the religious consciousness is for the worshipper such a transcendent principle. The conceived nature of that principle is thought of by the worshipper as the norm of personality. In the most highly developed religious consciousness, the one God, the ground of the human individual, is this principle and norm; that is, God is so related to man in that stage of religious consciousness as that he is not only transcendently personal, but also immanent in the individual. We have likewise discovered that the ethical consciousness presents opposition and divisiveness. This opposition and divisiveness have their reconciliation and unification in a consciousness which is ultra-social, *i. e.*, in the religious consciousness. We are thus brought face to face, in the consciousness of the race, with the ultimate unifying and inclusive principle of experience, the unifying and inclusive principle of the universe.

We call special attention to four facts which are involved in what we have discovered: (1) If we would find the unifying and explanatory principle of our consciousness of ourselves and the world, we must inquire of the religious consciousness; (2) The ethical norm is expressed in the object of worship; (3) In the most highly developed religious consciousness this object is Person, and that accords with what is essential to the ethical

norm; (4) The Philosophy of the Religious Consciousness is that for which all other Philosophy is but a preparation. The vastness and import of its claims and its significance for all else give it primacy in Reflective Thought. The fontal fact in the religious consciousness is that in it man completes the actualization of what is implicit in his consciousness of the external world and of self, in his conception of God, the self-subsistent person, as the ground of Being and Activity, the explanation of the universe and the norm of Personality.