

applied in the practical affairs in life. Ordinary dreams affect our waking thoughts; Spirit-born dreams affect them ennoblingly.

That holy dream—that holy dream
While all the world was chiding,
Hath cheered me as a lovely beam,
A lonely spirit guiding.

The golden dreams of age come from cherishing the golden visions of youth. The man who has been disobedient to the heavenly vision of youth, and has allowed his life to become sordid and commonplace, has nothing out of which to manufacture golden dreams when he is old. Every good old age must have had its vision, and must have

held to it, and followed it, until it became a dream.

Prophetic souls who have moved the world have mostly, like Isaiah and Paul, been young men when they saw the vision that transformed their lives, and thrust them forth to their predestined task. And when they were old they doubtless dreamed the dreams which made their closing days the best; thus fulfilling in themselves the purpose of Christianity to redeem the whole of human life from unprofitableness, and through the Spirit's outpouring, by which young men see visions and old men dream dreams, to keep the life of age from thinning out, making it rather increase to the end 'with the increase of God.'

The Conception of a Finite God.

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THE word 'infinite' as applied to God or to His attributes is not a Scriptural term, although it has always been applied to the Deity in Christian theology. Even the almightiness, omnipresence, and omniscience, which have been asserted or implied in certain passages of the Old and New Testament writings, do not transcend the finite unless the world as created, indwelt, and known by God be assumed to be infinite. It is from Greek philosophy that Christian theology borrowed the word in order to apply it to God and His attributes.

Again, it may be observed that Christian or other forms of religious experience do not presuppose or involve the necessity of regarding God as infinite. The religious belief that to God our hearts are open and that from Him no secrets are hid, or that in answer to prayer He is able if He will to satisfy human needs, does not imply a Power more than *adequate* to know and to do what religious experience demands; and that is within the limits of finitude, however much it be. Hume and Kant made a point against the old cosmological and teleological 'proofs' of the existence of God when they remarked that we can never argue from any kind of effect to a cause greater than is sufficient for the production of that

effect; and the satisfaction of the demands of religious experience is but a particular case of this general truth. God conceivably may transcend in knowledge, power, etc., the finite; but from the world or from our experience we cannot strictly infer that this is so.

Hence it may reasonably be asked whether the borrowing by theology of the idea of infinity from Greek philosophy was necessary or beneficial. And when we examine the various senses which the word has borne, it appears doubtful whether we can answer the question in the affirmative.

In ancient Greek philosophy, the source from which theology derived the concept, 'infinite' first meant boundless in the sense of essentially devoid of all defining limitations, and was therefore identical in meaning with the word 'absolute' in one of its current acceptations. In this sense 'infinite' was appropriated by gnostics and mystics, but not used, save perhaps very exceptionally, even by the platonizing Alexandrine Fathers. The second sense of 'infinite' with the Greeks was similar to that in which the term was used till lately in mathematical sciences, where it denotes the endless in space, time, or number: that which cannot be attained by successive acts of addition. This sense is again inapplicable to God, who is without

parts or magnitude. With Plato, 'infinity' came to mean perfection and immutability; and when borrowed with this signification it introduced into theology a tendency to doctrines incompatible with Christian and theistic faith. It was only when the word was deprived of its original signification of indeterminateness, and came to denote something determinate as well as surpassing all limits, that it could be appropriated at all by theology; and then only to describe the Divine attributes rather than the Divine Being Himself. Of late years mathematicians have invented a new meaning for 'infinity,' of quite a technical kind; but this does not lend itself at all to theology in that it is inapplicable to anything actual, and indeed only to classes, series, etc., composed of members within the realm of non-actual entities. Thus it would seem that the term 'infinite' has never borne any connotation which is at the same time definite and valuable, and throughout the history of its usage it has tended largely to be replaced by such terms as 'perfect' or 'eternal.' Theology can well spare the word.

On the other hand, it requires care when we would attempt to define the determinateness and limitation which we must predicate, instead of indeterminateness and infinitude, of God and His attributes. In a previous article it was argued that limitations were to be read into 'omnipotence' if without meaninglessness we are to retain that word in our doctrine of God. And the ideas of providence and purpose may similarly be shown to bespeak inherent limitation. Both, for instance, involve a relatedness to the time-process; and an 'increasing purpose,' a goal to which the world tends, implies distinction between means and end which could find no place in an unlimited mind with unlimited power, etc. From Origen onwards Christian theology has made use of the phrase Self-limitation, and has applied it in dealing with Creation, the Incarnation, human freedom, and other problems. The phrase is useful and fulfils a manifold need; and the only drawback to it is that it seems to imply a state preceding any act of limitation, or that God is what He is by His will and not by His nature. Perhaps this difficulty is not insuperable; but the problems to which it leads are too complex and difficult to warrant digression to discuss them here.

The attribute of omniscience perhaps also calls for qualifications such as those we found necessary

when considering omnipotence. Omniscience, or knowledge of all there is to know, of course involves foreknowledge of 'free' actions; and this subject has received passing notice from one or two recent writers on Theism. Professor Sorley¹ sees no difficulty here: 'If we remember that the infinite mind is not limited to a finite span of the time-process, we must allow that, notwithstanding the free causation of finite minds, the actions which we call future are yet eternally present to his knowledge. To a mind which transcends time there cannot be the difference which exists for us between memory and foresight; the past and the future must be equally open to his view. Universal determination contradicts freedom; universal knowledge does not. And, if God foresaw, can we suppose that he would call into being spirits who would frustrate his purpose?'

But the chief difficulty seems in this passage to be passed over. It is accentuated, however, by another living philosopher. Professor J. Ward remarked in his work, *The Realm of Ends*,² that perfect knowledge at one glance of the whole of the temporal order, past, present, and future, is ill-called foreknowledge; it is rather eternal knowledge. And (*op. cit.* p. 473) he further observes, 'There is no contradiction in a complete knowledge of all that has been; for what has been is as fact equally real with what is. Why then should there be anything contradictory in a complete knowledge of the future? Well, if there were not, we should have to say with Augustine, *futura jam facta sunt*. But this is just what we cannot say; for it is an obvious contradiction.' 'Foreknowledge of the future' (p. 478) 'is, we may contend, something of a misnomer. It is either not strictly fore-knowledge or it is not strictly knowledge.' The Divine knowledge is to be distinguished from His *creative* intuition; the former does not posit or constitute its objects. The free creature's creations are not God's creations, and therefore, as Professor Ward says, we are not entitled to assume that they are part of His knowledge. He knows the tendencies and possibilities of human activity; He is beyond surprise, and His purpose beyond frustration; but as that purpose is to allow His creatures some initiative and to associate them as co-workers with Himself, it surely must imply some contingency, and some self-limitation in respect of knowledge of the particular

¹ *Moral Values and the Idea of God*, p. 472.

² 1911, p. 313.

forms that free action will take. Direct intuition of even a finite free agent's free acts, which are totally different from the mechanically determined movements of heavenly bodies such as astronomy can predict, seems to us inconceivable even for a Divine mind; and thus our freedom may be held to set limits to God's omniscience. This is part of His self-limitation, and therefore implies no derogation from His majesty or from His value for religious experience.

Indeed, the philosophical theologians who seem desirous to retain the conception of an infinite God, wholly unlimited as to power and knowledge, tend to identify God with the Absolute; to conceive of Him not merely as the Supreme Being, the Ground of all reality, but as inclusive of all reality. And this resolves the many into the One, finite spirits into adjectives or modes of the Divine Being. It is pantheism, and culminates in denying the applicability to God of such conceptions as personality, ethical goodness, etc. God as thus conceived then becomes useless for religion, unknowable, or indistinguishable from Nature. If human individuality be real, and freedom not illusion, then God cannot be the whole of reality, or an Infinite Being unlimited by the creatures He has made.

But to affirm that God is determinate, personal, limited as to power and knowledge in ways which we have seen He must be if His nature is not to be regarded as self-contradictory, is not to go to the extreme of conceiving Him as a finite being only somewhat better, wiser, and more powerful than ourselves. It is not necessary, in order to be able to think of God as actual and living, to regard Him (as he, Mr. Wells, seems to do), as a consciousness compounded of the best elements in our consciousness, and destined like 'the social mind' to extinction when humanity shall be no more. It is not necessary, again, to conceive Him as a struggling

God who needs our help in order to achieve His purpose; as if the world, to contain a real moral issue, must be capable of defeating its Creator, and His triumph over evil cannot be depended upon until after the event. The doctrine propounded by Mr. Wells, indeed, leads to polytheism; for, as Dr. D'Arcy has remarked,¹ if a god be a collection of finite consciousnesses or a distillation of their better elements, there is no more reason why there should be one such rather than many, or why Athena should not be a reality rather than a mythical figment.

But Bishop D'Arcy's recent arguments against a Deity limited in any sense, against a God distinct from the philosopher's Absolute, do not seem to be cogent. Normal religious experience, as we have already seen, demands an adequate, but not necessarily an infinite, Providence; and the experience of the typical mystic, regarded by himself as a direct contact with the Deity, is expressible without the need of drawing a distinction between an infinite and a limited Being, although, to be sure, it has generally been interpreted by the mystic in terms of Pantheism rather than of Theism. Moreover though this great experience is very naturally expressed by mystics as a direct intuition of the Deity, the subjective facts concerning such experience can be psychologically explained without implication of any objective counterpart to it. Much so-called 'immediate experience' is really an interpretation involving complex mediation, and not pure and simple *datum*. The problem of evil, not to speak of other considerations, compels us to predicate limitation of a kind—such as is involved in all determinate being—of God; and the only alternative is an Absolute transcending all human valuations such as good and evil, and whose experience includes all our folly and wickedness and illusion.

¹ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1917-18.