

Westminster Seminary
December 5, 1938

Dr. Gordon H. Clark
Wheaton College
Wheaton, Illinois.

Dear Clark:-

6 Your letter containing the article on the place of the intellect in respect to the Scriptures came today. I shall be glad to make a few remarks about it.

Before doing so I should like to ask your advice about a matter. Your father wrote me last week. He wants me to read and criticize his book on philosophy. I told him I shall be glad to read it and have a talk about it. But now my fears are somewhat aroused. He is pretty well along in years and not in robust health. Suppose I should differ with him on his conception of philosophy. Would it be too much of a strain on him if I should go into the matter with him, in case we differed? As far as ~~an~~ a detailed knowledge of the history of philosophy is concerned I cannot do anything for him that you cannot do much better. I am, however, glad to read his manuscript and discuss it with him. Only I thought I should ask you about the advisability of it.

As to the notes on Apologetics of which you speak I expect there will be some available by February. Rudolph is planning to make a number of copies of them. I have no time to revise them fully but hope to do something toward improving sections of them.

I shall be brief in my remarks on your paper. I have just finished reading it. Perhaps I should wait and reread it later but I feel I must do this at once or for ~~my~~ fear other matters intervene and prevent me from doing it.

With the larger part of your paper I find myself in hearty agreement. You have stated the criticism on ~~the~~ the theology of feeling and Voluntarism admirably. I can also, I think, agree to a large extent when you say that Christianity has more sympathy with "intellectualism" than with either of the other views. The Hegelian ~~argument~~ argument against anti-intellectualism of every sort is certainly refreshing.

But can our agreement with such intellectualism as that of Hegel be more than a formal one? Will not the intellectualism you speak of be finally subject to the same criticism which you launch at voluntarism and emotionalism? It seems to me that it will. If we say that the real is the rational and the rational is the real we must apply this first to God as He exists by Himself apart from the created world. To that we must add the doctrine of creation into nothing. Thus we make a basic distinction between the reach of God's intellect and ~~the reach of man's intellect.~~ the reach of man's intellect.

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Reality, uncreated reality, divine reality may and must , it seems to me, be forthwith identified with rationality. God's consciousness and His being are coextensive; His being and His attributes are one. Created reality too is rational in the sense that whatsoever comes to pass happens in accord with the counsel of God. On the other hand God might have created the universe otherwise than He did. There might be various rational ways of existing for the ~~universe~~ created universe. Hence with respect to the created universe we cannot say that the rational is the real.

which case the real cannot be known.

The fatal flaw of Hegelianism may be said to be that, ^{in effect} it fails to make the distinction between the Creator's mind and the creature's mind. The Logic of Hegel would lead to the the position of of Parmenides. ~~the Parmenides~~ I quote from Burnet on Greek Philosophy, Part I "Hales to Plato page 67: "

To the mathematician of all men it is the same thing that can be thought (esti noein) and that can be (esti einai), and this is the principle from which Parmenides starts. It is impossible to think what is not, and it is impossible for what cannot be thought to be. The great question, Is it or is it not? is therefore equivalent to the question, Can it be thought or not?

to consider Parmenides goes on ~~in~~ in the light of this principle the consequences of anything that is. In the first place, it cannot have come into being. If it had it must have arisen from nothing or from something. It cannot have arisen from nothing; for there is no nothing. It cannot have arisen from something, for there is nothing else than what is. Nor can anything besides itself come into being; for there can be no empty space in which it could do so. Is it or is it not? If it is, then it is now, all at once. In this way Parmenides refutes all accounts of the origin of the world. Ex nihilo nihil fit."

Any non-theistic and non-Christian form of intellectualism will, it would seem, always have to reduce temporal reality to a "bloodless ballet of categories". It was ~~the~~ and is in opposition to such non-Christian intellectualisms that modern voluntarism, emotionalism and existentialism have arisen. The argument between the two, intellectualism on the one hand and all forms of ~~anti~~ anti-intellectualism on the other hand, can never get beyond the proportions of a family quarrel. Both agree with Singer that the question What do we know? may be ignored when we ask the question How do we know? (Experience and Reflection, Chpt I p.4) By thus assuming that we can intelligently ask the epistemological question without asking the metaphysical question they have taken the position that reality is all on one level. If this is done the irrationalist have, to say the least, as much right as the intellectualists. Nay rather, in that case the irrationalists would seem to have the better of the argument. To discover what virtue is we shall be driven to go to the "soothsayers" inasmuch as the human mind cannot comprehend the "science of the future". Human intellect is not comprehensive in its grasp. And ~~then~~ for it to hold complete comprehension before itself as a limiting concept is only to admit that the irrationalists are essentially right.

If then we are to avoid falling into scepticism we shall need to do more than set intellectualism as such over against voluntarism etc. We shall have to distinguish clearly between a Christian and a non-Christian intellectualism. The creation doctrine, that is, real temporal creation ex or into nihilo is the touchstone between them.

Taking the Christian conception of man's creation by God we need not elevate one aspect of man's personality above another aspect of his personality. As you say, personality is a unit, which thinks and will and loves. Psychologically we may and must speak of the priority of the intellect but not logically. We cannot speak and think of our willing and loving, we cannot direct our willing and loving with the guidance of the intellect. But this

we do not have to have all types of persons impossible

psychological priority betokens no logical or metaphysical priority. The "vision of deity" is no more ~~ultimate~~ ultimate as an end for man than the love of deity or the work for deity. We are prophets, priests and kings; why should the prophet rule over the priest or the king? Life is not deeper than logic, but it is certainly wider than human logic.

I have perhaps said enough to indicate my general reaction. Perhaps I have somewhere misunderstood you. If so my criticism must to that extent be discounted. Perhaps I have not made myself clear. If so I shall be happy to try again if you think it worth while. I greatly appreciate the opportunity of corresponding with you on matters of this sort.

With kind regards

C. Van Til

P.S. Do you wish me to return the manuscript?

work & love is to understand
what is the literal meaning of this?

I requested a distinction between know and know plus work in the interests of epistemology. Van Til admitted no distinction.