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On Religious Freedom and Some Psychological and Ethical Questions Connected with It[1)].

For the most part religious freedom is understood as something merely *external* and merely negative, namely what our Constitution expresses by saying that no one may be deprived, on account of his confession of faith, of access to the full enjoyment of civil or political rights. Even this is something very significant, when one remembers what resistance the principle thus pronounced had to struggle against before it prevailed. But for him who reflects on the change that has been inaugurated, with the recognition of this principle, in the whole spirit and direction of human life, — for him who holds that the outer and the inner may well come into a certain opposition to one another, yet in the long run must correspond to one another if life is to be healthy and vigorous, — for him who looks further than to the merely outward and provisional, — for him there lie in religious freedom psychological and ethical problems of the greatest importance, problems which no one who takes life seriously can avoid being confronted with. I shall here attempt to bring out and illuminate some of these problems. In order that they may properly emerge, I must begin with some historical, or, as it is now the custom to say, sociological remarks.

I.

Positive religion is *social* religion, in that it is built on tradition, on the proclamation of the Word. In different forms this principal feature is found again in all religions. It
[449] is not the separate individuals who devise their religion, but they are initiated into the one that lives on in the line of descent. As soon as one ascribes to the single individual — his need, his feeling, his power of judgment — an absolute right of decision in religious matters, one has already entered upon rationalism. Religion is a *historical* power; it is the proclamation of a sacred history that forms the foundation on which it is built.

In its simplest form religion is built on a tradition that is propagated within one and the same family from generation to generation. The spirits of the departed are

[1)] Essentially a lecture given in the Students' Association on 20 March 1886.

worshipped with sacrifices and gifts, the hearth-fire is kept burning in their honor, and their commands are respected as the highest law. In the practice of this *family religion* only those take part who belong to the line of descent; the father of the family, who leads it, stands as the highest living authority in religious as in other respects. To this very day this kind of worship is the most widespread on earth, in that it subsists beneath, alongside, or as a part of the national religions. Only in Christianity and in Mohammedanism has this worship disappeared entirely[1)].

The national religion arose when the whole State received its common gods and heroes, its common hearth. Like the family, the State was originally both a religious and a political society. There was no difference between State and Church, any more than between religious, legal, and moral laws. It was the duty of every citizen to take part in the public worship, but foreigners were excluded from it. Each State had its gods, just as each family had its own.

A significant turning point occurred when the *idea of the Church as a universal religious society* arose. Family differences and national barriers were now to have only subordinate validity. There shall no longer be Jew or Gentile, Greek or barbarian. A purely spiritual society shall exist. But here too the religious society, the spiritual unity, is conditioned by the common transmission of a sacred history, from which individuals draw the highest law for their lives and the deepest assurance for their fate in this world and in a world beyond. For European humanity, Christianity asserted *[450]* this idea in a victorious manner.

In the beginning the Church placed itself in sharp distinction from other human societies as a kingdom that was not of this world. It lived in the expectation that this world would come to an end. When this expectation was not fulfilled, the Church began its cultural-historical mission. It soon stamped its character upon inner and outer life alike, whether its dominion appeared in its ruling the State outright, or in the State's seeing in it an indispensable instrument for securing peace and obedience. After the medieval church-state, in which the Pope was the head of the Emperor, came the rule of the "territorial" principle, by which the religion of the sovereign was also to be that of his subjects (cujus regio, ejus religio).

Then, from the eighteenth century onward, the principle of the religious neutrality of the State emerges. What isolated thinkers had demanded was now proclaimed as

[1)] *Henry Maine*: Early Law and Custom. p. 57 ff. — It was *Fustel de Coulange* who, in his interesting book "La cité antique", first demonstrated the great importance and primitive character of family religion within Greek and Roman religion.

law for great nations. The Constitution of the North American free states is the first that is built on the principle of religious freedom.

A great good has thereby been attained. The spiritual struggle can now be conducted more freely, since the external conditions are more equal for all. However powerful prejudice and fanaticism may still continually be, they no longer command such means as the stake and fire or outward persecution.

But a great ideal, a great thought has been given up: the thought of a common faith, of an inward spiritual fellowship for the whole human race. And a great force seems bound to be lost, the one that lies in union through a common view of life's greatest problems. We now have leave each to be saved after his own fashion. But will it not easily bring with it that we each sail our own sea and lose mutual understanding?

II.

It will be answered from the side of the Church that there is no danger: the dissolution will be only transitory, and on the ground of freedom a new unity of faith, truer than the earlier enforced unity, will be attained. And in the camp of the freethinkers many hope that the time is not far off when all rational, honest, and cultivated people will have turned their backs on the Church, so that at most only blockheads and hypocrites will remain.

[451] I share neither of these expectations. — Just as little as the Catholic Church, in spite of its great hope and its eager exertions, will be able to win the Protestants back, just as little will the Church be able to win the freethinkers back. Just as little as there is in Catholicism a possibility of such a revival or such an unfolding of spiritual superiority that the Protestants thereby could be moved to give up their freedom of faith, their right to independent religious examination, just as little is there any possibility that the Church should remove from the world the motives which make people freethinkers. The medieval Church was still able to gather into itself all the spiritual strength of the age. But life is now too rich, too independent, too manifold, for anything of the kind to be possible. The great problems have been posed so clearly and sharply that no dogmatic formula can cover them over. The need — whether one thinks that a solution of life's riddles is to be had or not — nonetheless to deal with them in one's own way has become so powerful that it will not again be able to be subdued. It can be lulled to sleep for a time, but will always awaken anew, as long as there exists a higher spiritual life. And what holds for the sphere of knowledge holds

also for the life of imagination, of feeling, and of will. Here too the free movement of the powers has already become so great a good that one will not give it up again. Life is lived no less deeply and richly outside the Church than in it. Over against ecclesiastical faith there stands, and for the future will always stand, a serious, free, and self-conscious view of life.

The freethinkers who think that the age of the positive religions is past do not see that the Church will precisely gain by religious freedom. The conflict that has been raised against the Church in the last centuries concerns for the most part far more the Church's worldly power and outward dominion than the dogmas. The conflict has not been so much over the truth of the dogmas as over their right to determine the civil and moral position of individuals. The experiences that have been had in North America, in France after the Revolution, and in Germany after 1875 prove that ecclesiastical interest and earnestness increase with separation from the State. What apparently weakens the Church in reality strengthens it. The free forces are awakened to activity. Even the English state church, the stiffest of all Protestant state churches, is built more and more on the principle of voluntariness. Tocqueville derived the great power of religion in North America from its having withdrawn entirely from politics. There, in the promised land of freedom, it has so great an influence that *[452]* public opinion sets far narrower limits to free inquiry and free views than it does here in Europe. Freethinkers who are at the same time Democrats, and who work for the separation of the Church from the State, must therefore have a great and cheerful faith in the power of truth. — What indeed would life be without such a faith? But one can have it and yet hold that the end is very far off.

Since it is of importance for a question to which I shall later draw attention, I shall here set forth, from a purely psychological standpoint, some of the causes which in my view will continue to bring adherence to positive religious faith. There are of course very many different psychological circumstances that operate here[1)]; but there are especially two points on which my experience and my investigations have led me to lay stress.

The further spiritual development advances, the more differentiated become the particular sides or directions of spiritual life. Theoretical inquiry and practical interest, understanding and feeling, science and art, separate themselves more or less from

[1)] In my treatise "Forholdet mellem Tro og Viden i dets historiske Udvikling" (Vor Ungdom. 1885) I have had occasion to mention some causes which made themselves felt in the religious reaction at the beginning of this century (See especially p. 189—196).

one another. Each side of life poses its tasks in its own way and solves them by its peculiar methods. The result easily becomes a division of strength and interest, a lack of concentration, which is unendurable to many natures. There will arise a natural need to gather what is scattered into one point, or at least to have one region where the distinction does not intervene, one sphere where one can feel undivided life in its whole fullness. There are now surely several different ways in which this need can be satisfied. But this much is certain, that in the great folk religions there is very much that meets it. These religions have — each in its time — afforded full satisfaction for all directions of spiritual life. They do not distinguish between the true, the beautiful, and the good. They do not address themselves especially to the understanding or to the imagination or to feeling or to the will, but speak to all
[453] faculties at once and are understood only when they can at once get them all to speak. Positive religion in its classical form knows no special science, no special art, no special ethics or politics. It always marks a beginning rupture when one of these endeavors separates itself as something apart and wants to go its own ways. For when, e.g., science becomes a province of its own beside religion, then religion too becomes a province of its own beside science, and is no longer the form and bearer of life in its totality. The great positive religions are peculiar condensations or syntheses of thoughts and ideals, hopes and endeavors, which critical inquiry assigns to different provinces and under different points of view. There will now be many whose nature is so constituted that their most deeply reaching intellectual, aesthetic, and ethical need demands satisfaction together, — for whom a thought that does not at the same time satisfy the imagination's need for vivid images and feeling's need for hope and consolation is no *true* thought either. They cannot and will not distinguish (as we in psychology distinguish) between feeling itself and the more or less symbolic forms in which it comes to light, or between a thought's ideal value and real validity. A religious reaction often comes after a time poor in feeling and imagination, and can then serve to enrich and strengthen the life of the spirit. The spiritual life has, like all life, a rhythmic character, moves forward through changing periods of gathering and scattering, unity and distinction, synthesis and analysis. And there will always be natures who are especially disposed for the one of these directions.

The second point that I wish to emphasize stands apparently in conflict with the first, but only apparently. It is the way in which life's greatest and strongest oppositions come to outbreak and expression in the positive religions. Religious feeling contains a need to experience exhaustively the greatest suffering and the

greatest delight, the greatest fall and the greatest uprising that can be conceived. Only then does it think it knows life, when it knows the greatest oppositions that life can bring; and only when it knows life in this way does it trust that it can overcome the world. In the great folk religions the most conflicting feelings are awakened. Human minds are led through them, as Dante was led through Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Religious worship works especially through contrasts. In the Eleusinian mysteries the participants seem to have celebrated the story of Demeter and Persephone: the *[454]* mother's grief at the daughter's disappearance, her anguish of soul and her restless searching, finally her jubilation at the rediscovery. So the Greeks too had their mater dolorosa. In the year of the Christian Church the life of Christ is lived through anew by the faithful, and with it a series of the greatest oppositions in the domain of the emotional life. — There are natures who find full nourishment for their need to live through the oppositions only within a positive religion. There is something in this need that is common to all humanity, and that shows itself in every serious person. The aesthetic effect of the tragic is connected with this without, however, entirely coinciding with what is here under discussion. Natures in whom this need asserts itself with special strength will not easily distinguish, as others do, between feeling itself and the symbols in which it gives itself expression and finds rest; the symbol becomes for them dogma, the perfect expression of the highest truth.

I mention this also in order to point out how little mere logical and historical criticism in the religious domain penetrates to the heart of the matter. Behind the logical contradictions and historical improbabilities that criticism is able to point out lie the mighty movements of feeling and oppositions of feeling. It is these that make existence so great a riddle; how can it contain the oppositions that call forth these conflicting feelings? how can they spring from one and the same source? how can they be reconciled and overcome? — It is clear that one may very well acknowledge and feel the reality of the oppositions without approving the attempts to solve that riddle. One can recognize that existence shows us both the greatest suffering and the greatest happiness, both the deepest abasement and the most exalted greatness, and yet not understand how they can be due to the same cause, especially when this is supposed to be an absolutely good being. Dogma stands here — in my conviction — just as powerless as science. But the fully justified criticism of the solutions ought not to bring about a failure to appreciate the strong impulses that lead to the posing of the questions. For thereby one makes life narrow and poor. We stand still — despite all our philosophy of religion and our comparative science of religion — very far behind

in regard to understanding of the psychological foundation of the positive religions.
[455] I have strayed somewhat from my main subject and now return to it.

III.

This much is certain, that the struggle will be a long one. In the opinion of many it will become the eternal conflict. Should that be so, we must make ourselves familiar with it. For a serious view of life the whole of life is a great struggle, and this one will then be only one of its many forms. But it is not a matter of indifference on what basis and in what manner the conflict is waged. Is it to be waged from the ecclesiastical side with the passage of Scripture as its motto with which an American pastor took the field against Darwin and Spencer: "Should I not hate those who hate thee, Lord!"? And is it to be waged from the opposite side with scorn and mockery? — Against the worst excesses in this direction provision has surely been made by the official recognition of religious freedom. Outward, civil life can go its way, undisturbed by the different faiths of the several individuals. The fanatical believers and non-believers must in any case tolerate each other's presence in society. But that is, as already remarked earlier, a decidedly external and negative relation.

Nor will it be enough to point to the ever more widespread and ever better grounded conviction that the religious problems concern something which by its nature lies outside the reach of strict science. For the question is precisely: what then? Are we to let one another each sail his own sea, because one can after all know nothing certain about these things? Will it not lead to indifference or to a severing of every more deeply penetrating spiritual connection between those who do not belong to the same sect? — And in any case one would then not be able to demand tolerance of those who declare themselves to be altogether certain in their cause, — more certain than any science whatever could make them. The Catholics thus often claim[1)] that the Protestants *must be* tolerant, because they dare not maintain that their Church is the one true one, but that the Catholics *cannot be* so, because it is part of their faith that their Church is the one true one. The Protestants perhaps let the claim pass on to the freethinkers — but the freethinkers who think that all believers
[456] must be either stupid or hypocritical, since they can believe what they believe, will send it back with protest.

[1)] See e.g. a statement by a Catholic bishop, which is quoted in F. C. Baur: Kirchengeschichte des 19ten Jahrhunderts. P. 264.

If religious freedom is to have more than external and negative significance, we must investigate whether there may not be common domains which can be withdrawn from the conflict, although they are of essential influence on human life, and whether the possibility of mutual understanding and sympathy is altogether cut off in respect of the very questions about which the conflict is being waged. In the first respect it would be of great importance above all if there is a humane ethics building on a natural human basis. In the latter respect it will depend on whether people who stand on different religious standpoints can nevertheless have a certain spiritual kinship with one another.

If the only point of view which the different religious standpoints know in relation to one another is: truth or lie, then it is of no use to investigate these questions. But in that case it is also hard to see how one can accept external, civil religious freedom. How can one put up with it that liars exercise civil rights and take part in deciding public affairs? And it is also hard to see how one can recognize the independence of science. If there is a science which reaches its goal without regard to and without guidance from religious views, then at least a part of the truth can after all be attained by human means. For however one may judge between knowledge and faith, — in the end there can be only one truth. — But should the capacity of human nature to develop by its own powers be confined to civil life and to science? Is there not also a purely human ethics which, at any rate to a certain degree, is independent of religious assumptions? — I do not understand how anyone who sees in every human being a distinctive personal being can deny this. A personal being can only have in itself the ultimate standard for what it is to recognize as true, noble and good. Whether it be something supernatural or something natural that personality stands over against: in its own inner self it must seek the principles for understanding and appraisal of everything that presents itself to it. Whatever ideals man may then recognize, and however exalted the ethical law may stand even *for him*, they must after all be ideal and law for him, and become so only by finding points of attachment in his inner spiritual nature. It is the great significance of Socrates's *Command: Know* *[457]*
thyself! by which he became the founder of ethics. Philosophical ethics in its various forms has built on this principle, which may be called *the principle of personality*, the principle both of free inquiry and of free conscience. In working with this principle, philosophical ethics at the same time draws the consequences of the principle of universal love of humankind. It cannot accept the view that the difference between acceptance or non-acceptance of certain religious doctrines is to draw an absolute

boundary between human beings, to divide them eternally into two parts. As love of humankind has broken through the barriers that separated nation from nation and class from class, so it will and must also break through the barriers which confessional differences have set up against the full recognition of the personal life in all human beings. The religious conflict will not cease thereby, and it will not lose its sharpness. Nothing is to be abated in the question of what truth is. But the conflict can be sharp without being bitter and hateful.

If believers can regard the non-believers' virtues only as splendid vices, — if the non-acceptance of the Church's doctrine is to be derived solely from evil will and antipathy to holiness, — if the conflict between faith and unbelief is wholly one with the conflict between good and evil, then all hope is gone. Often it sounds as if that were so. But much of what is said is also only big words, not thoughts, at any rate not thoughts whose consequences one draws. For the full consequence of such thoughts would lead far back — back to the Middle Ages, to the time that lies before the recognition of religious freedom and the development of modern culture!

For the believer the purely human ethics will of course not be able to be exhaustive. But it must nevertheless be of interest also to him to see how far one can reach along this path, and he will quite well be able himself to take part in the inquiry. He will reserve the right to set his own spire on the building. But there will in any case be a protected domain of great importance, into which the religious struggle need not penetrate, just as little as it now penetrates the territories of physics and chemistry[1)].

[458] Only when it is recognized that ethics has its basis in human nature itself will actual, positive religious freedom become possible, since the greatest obstacle will have been cleared away for mutual understanding and sympathy between people who stand at different religious standpoints.

There is yet another important condition which must be present, and which — partly on account of the dogmatic manner in which the religious struggle, both as attack and as defense, has been waged — is as yet developed only to a slight degree among us. It is the sense for personal life, especially the emotional life, in all its different forms. It is also very closely connected with the faith that in every human being there stirs, or at any rate there is a disposition to, a distinctive life. It presupposes a delight in hearing each bird sing with its own beak. But it demands

[1)] Concerning the nature and significance of humane ethics I permit myself to refer partly to my work *[458]* "Om Grundlaget for den humane Etik" (Copenhagen 1876), partly to my treatise "Om den filosofiske Etiks Principer" in "Oversigt over det kgl. danske Videnskabernes Selskabs Forhandlinger i Aaret 1886".

a special education. We are as yet far too dogmatic in our psychology. We proceed far too confidently from the assumption that others perceive, think and feel in quite the same way as we. Individual differences make themselves felt even in the simplest mental activities, differences which one has only just begun to bring to light. How much more must the higher spiritual life take shape differently, and how careful we must be not to draw hasty conclusions from the manner in which the emotional life gives expression in words or symbols! These may sound alike and yet cover inner movements of very different kinds. Only he who has the capacity to distinguish between shell and kernel discovers these differences, this richness. He who stops at the positive or negative confession of faith gets no further than the surface. The flower that grows in the tall grass is discovered only by him who bends the long blades aside. But he who does so will not merely find great differences and rich nuances where he did not suspect them. He will also discover that spiritual kinship is other than dogmatic kinship. Just as behind the same confession of faith a most different inner emotional life may lie, so behind different confessions of faith a closely akin emotional life may lie. It may be difficult to penetrate to it, and we stand far behind in this art. But until one learns it, one has not yet learned to know what is *[459]* essential in man. As Schiller has already said: what we think belongs to all; only what we feel is our own. And the emotional life always has a certain independence of thoughts and ideas. Let us take a single example. For the serious believer as for the serious freethinker life stands as a struggle in which it is a matter of upholding the ideal; they feel the tragic in this struggle and the great antitheses through which it leads; their feeling of life, their feeling about existence is in the end determined by these experiences. Should there not be greater spiritual kinship between two such persons than between such as belong to the same confession but whose emotional life moves in wholly different courses? — Psychologically viewed, the difference between the believer and the freethinker is often only this, that the former has his dogmatic forms in which he finds expression for his innermost experiences of life, whereas the freethinker must say with Faust:

> Ich habe keinen Namen dafür!
> Gefühl ich alles,
> Name ist Schall und Rauch.

Amid the standing, perhaps eternal, conflict it would be a great good if an understanding of the kind I have here indicated could develop. It would be not only an

enrichment and extension of our life, it would be the only possible form of the spiritual unity of the human race, now that the great idea of uniting all under one confession has had to succumb. Religious freedom would then be not merely something external and negative, but without abating anything in what the great conflict essentially turns on, the gathering and unifying forces would be able to work.

Harald Høffding.