

Epistemology and Spirituality

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March 17, 2006

Introduction

The various methods of epistemology have been derived from the common human forms of coming to know and making judgments. These usual forms, since the Enlightenment, include: 1) reason, 2) experience, 3) science, and 4) history. Almost never included in philosophy books (except for a few Kantians) as methods of knowing are methods such as: 5) personal intuition or insight (veridical knowledge), 6) spiritual direct knowledge (personal revelation) or spiritual experience (mystical experience; voices, dreams, visions), or 7) spiritual warfare. Recently Avery Dulles (2000) has proposed that spiritual sources of knowledge are available to all of us in some ways, and indirectly to all of us from the direct experience of some of us. This fits with the work of Dallas Willard (1999), Christopher Dawson, and Richard Foster on means of discerning the word or will of God in our daily lives, and more recent approaches to spiritual formation by Blackaby, Eldredge, and Lawrenz.

A technical discussion is going on in philosophy as to the status of intuition. Audi (1998, 2004), using W. D. Ross and Falkenstein (2004), reconstructing Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic, proposed updated theories on the value of intuition. Audi integrates Rossian intuitionism with Kantian ethics. He anchors intuitionism in a pluralistic theory of value, leading to an account of the relation between the right and the good. Levinas (1995) developed his own explanation of intuition. Wilson (1999) and Pust (2000) are developing intuition as a modification of pragmatism. DePaul and Ramsey (1998) did an entire edited volume on rethinking intuition. An older version (Dennehy, 1986) searched intuition for a basis for certitude.

I think this practical search and philosophical discussion come together in the area of human spirituality. Using the overall title of "spirituality" I want to add a fifth category, human spiritual experience, to the usual four given above. To do this I will set out a starting point for a method of human

spirituality, reasonable limits on the method, and procedures of making spiritual judgment similar to the other epistemological methods of judgment.

Some Roman Catholic authors have worked on this, most notably Collins in *The Emergence of Philosophy of Religion* (1967; cf. Clinton, 1969), Rahner in the early part of *Foundations of Christian Faith* (1978) and throughout *Spirit in the World* (1968; cf. Sheehan, 1985), and Fiorenza in *Foundational Theology* (1984). Of these, only Fiorenza deals with contemporary philosophical discussions (1987) and Collins with philosophy of religion (1967).

The only Protestants who have dealt with this at length are Carnell in *Christian Commitment* (1957; cf. Dickie, 1953, Sims, 1979) and MacGregor in *Philosophical Issues in Religious Thought* (1973); but again, both deal with the metaphysical or philosophical basis of thought, not with ontological description of spiritual reality. Pannenberg (1985) touches on this but does not develop the philosophical approach to spiritual life (cf. Farrelly, 1986).

In this paper I will discuss the origin and foundation of spiritual life, looking at theological issues from a philosophical perspective.

In addition to a realist ontology and epistemology (Moreland & Craig, 2003), we must also develop an axiology. Putnam has argued that commitments to values underlie ontological convictions and hence take precedence in determining one's world view (1981, p. 215). Whether we agree with Putnam's prioritization of values, or his internal realist arguments, or even if we think his prioritization is system-bound to individual relativism, he makes a good case for the inter-relatedness of the concepts and the need to include values in the philosophical discussion. This emphasis on the priority of values fits closely with Polanyi (1958). A hierarchy of value types has been developed by Kohlberg (1981) and an elaboration of the actual value developmental process has been developed by Krathwold (1964). The search for necessary moral truths has been summarized by Ganssle (2000).

I. Starting Point

The theistic realist should begin on philosophic grounds with ontology, present a world view (basic conceptual grid) as a whole, then discuss and defend the parts. Thus, the inter-related conceptual system is itself the logical starting point within a realist orientation. This approach is reminiscent of, but a

significant development beyond, Carnell's starting point with hypotheses of a rationalist system (1948). Both approaches are very different than Van Til's presuppositional approach. A realist does not start with his system as a given but as a proposal for review. A new realist approach forces each thinker to a realization that one's person, via his values, is revealed in his writing, if any constructive work is to be done (cf. Cooke, 1986). As a realist position this approach assumes the truth of an external world, other persons, and God and that these beings/spirits influence us; in Heidegger's terms (1962), they present themselves to us. Our physical, mental and intuitional ability reconstructs the nature of the being presented to us and the meaning of that being, using memory as well. Our understanding of the nature of being and the meaning of life set our personal foundations (Plantinga, 2000). Knowledge is constructed from internal and external evidence, partially in isolation, partly in community (Fiorenza, 1987).

Carnell (1957) and others (Goldman, 1986) have pointed to the legitimacy of personal subjective experience within a philosophic theory. Martin (1986) gave an excellent summary of their work. But MacGregor (1973), Rahner (1978) and Pannenberg (1985) illustrate that such a subjectivity is a necessity. Following Collins and MacGregor, I suggest the following agenda for conceptual development of realistic theism.

Chart I: Agenda for Development of Realistic Theism

1. Develop a form of theistic realism which is compatible with both scripture and historical experience (a set of preliminary value choices regarding metaphysical issues).
2. Develop an epistemology which defines the nature of truth and reflects the knowing process to which our metaphysic has committed us.
3. Based on the metaphysical and epistemological grounding, develop a structure, of values, which will serve as a base for axiological decisions in politics, law, ethics, etc.
4. Reassess our philosophical and theological interpretations using theistic realism as the philosophic part of the world view grid.
5. Develop a systematic process for integrating the resulting theology and values into other disciplines.

6. Develop a strategy for influencing our culture in each area of importance. This should lead to effective penetration and eventual transformation of culture and society.

The values in #3 could come from ethics, biblical theology and a doctrine of the Christian life (cf. Clinton, 1987). Note that a hierarchy must be developed in order for effective decision making to take place (cf. Scholes, 1986; Clinton, 1987). Models of #5 are often based on Niebuhr's five approaches (1951). But his approaches are system dependent and ultimately fail to provide a philosophically fruitful way to develop a model for integration (Clinton, 1994). A new approach is needed.

For this enterprise, the foundation lies in explicating a theistic realism as an adequate foundation for a world view. As Christians, we are committed to the existence of God and the truthfulness of His Word as revealed in the Bible. Thus, efforts by evangelicals like Corduan (1981) to critique and learn from positions of Rahner and Aquinas, or of Grunler (1983) to reinterpret the best of process thought, are to be applauded. We need to expand these critiques to include Putnam (1981) and Dummett (1982) on realism, Rahner (1978) and Lonergan (1972, 1977; see Keefe's summary) on the value of a modified phenomenology (cf. Clinton, 1984 A), and many other people. Along the way, there will be much pure creative work as we fill in such a system.

As evangelicals we can see fundamental directions being set from three sources: historical experience, personal human experience (Smith, 1970), and propositional revelation. Of course, with three sources of information, we are open to the possibility of conflict between them. However, as believers in the consistency of God's work, we do not anticipate any real conflict of truth between the fields. Tracy (1981) well illustrated the use of analogy in modern times to enable us to see spiritual reality.

II. Origin of Spiritual Life

All people have an orientation toward relating to God which is worked out in their lives in their value commitments and religious practices (MacGregor, 1973, Rahner, 1978). The fact of this subjective reflective experience and personal and social objective experience is common to all men, although the specific content and response is different for each person. This is what theologians have called common grace. The analysis of this spiritual experience usually focuses on the biblical data or on objective religious experience. I would like to add a philosophical analysis of the spiritual area.

There are three interrelated aspects to the spiritual area of a person's life: Each person has a spirit; each person can receive spiritual impressions from other spirits; each person can be indwelt by another spirit.

A. The reality of one's own spirit includes, functionally, the ability to receive and comprehend (recognize intuitively) spiritual reality. This comprehension within human experience has the possibility of being brought to the level of conscious reflection. But such reflection is not necessary, since spiritual reality is comprehensible through the innate categories of the mind and the spirit (there is a 'fit' with our personal apparatus) and can be responded to at the levels of values, apart from conscious reflective experience.

The fact of humanity's fallenness causes the responses to move in one direction: rebellion. But the discussion is also open in the area of common or prevenient grace. Peter says, "I see that God is not a respecter of persons, but in all nations the one who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to Him." (Acts 10:). Since Cornelius' spirit was open to seeking God we know that the Spirit of God had already been at work based on general revelation and on the exposure to Jewish religion. Peter does show the necessity of such a person moving deeper by sharing the gospel with Cornelius and those present (Clinton, 1989).

Of course the integration of spiritual values and realities into a person's life will be much quicker and more efficient if there is help with the process via preaching, teaching and discipleship.

We also have the ability to make decisions regarding all of life in dynamic harmony between the spiritual, innate and reflective areas (heart, soul, and mind). However, there must be more to the spiritual area than a functional ability and internal interactive capability. Ontologically, the spiritual area consists of an immaterial element of a person's being which is the source of his or her ability to make spiritual decisions and to interact with spiritual realities such as God, other people's spirits, etc.

Understanding such a spiritual reality conceptually necessitates having a conceptual grid to see what the primary elements of the non-rational life and how all the elements can be integrated using research from psychology, education and sociology, and a theoretical matrix can be constructed.

B. A second aspect of the spiritual area includes the possibility of receiving spiritual input from other spirits and people. This is not the same as being internally responsive or reflective concerning my own spirit, as described above. We are in touch with motivations and values held by other spirits with whom we are interacting. I call this area spiritual impressions. When functioning in this area, we often say that a person is distinguishing another person's spirit or is responding to another's spirit. While this includes a rational element, it is not essentially a reflective function.

C. The third area of spiritual reality is the capacity to have my personal spirit directed (i.e., led or strongly influenced initially, only later can there be absolute control) by another spirit. In common literature this is known as being influenced or possessed by another spirit. In a philosophical sense it is the reality that another spirit can so influence my spirit that I can be led to obey the other spirit as though it were my own. In this case, I am not the source of the spiritual direction. Nor am I merely responding to an external influence over which I have significant control. This is an extreme position where great influence is exerted on my spirit to lead me to act a certain way or to believe a certain way, which, if I do not resist it, will eventuate in my acting in keeping with the direction of the indwelling spirit.

If the indwelling (or, prior to a spiritual or reflective commitment on my part to allow the indwelling, influencing) spirit is God's, then we have arrived at the biblical case of being led by the Spirit of God. If the indwelling spirit is an evil spirit, then we have a case of demonic influence or possession.

Once a situation of full indwelling (surrender of control; dedication; submission) has occurred, the source of spiritual direction and decision will be the secondary spirit, until this direction is actively resisted. Thus, the person who is "filled with the Spirit" is one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and continues to be influenced by the Spirit at the valuational level, the reflective level, and at an emotional level. In a case of demonic possession, the person is indwelt by and receives direction in value and reflection from an evil spirit.

In the case of God's Spirit, we are told that while the filling --that is the active influence-- can be resisted, the indwelling itself is permanent. In the case of an evil spirit, the influence can be resisted but the indwelling/possession probably is not reversible by the person. It is reversible by the Holy Spirit.

These considerations lead us to the questions of how the human spirit originates, how it is

influenced and how it can be indwelt by another spirit.

D. The origin of the human spirit is described two ways in scripture. First, the spirit of a person is said to return at death to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7). In Zechariah 12:1 we are told that God creates the spirit of man within him (cf. Job 34:14; Luke 23:46; Num. 16:22 and 27:16; Isa 57:16). But there is also indication in scripture that the spirit is part of the man which is given in a Traducian way, that is, by generation from the parents (cf. Romans 5 and others). Numbers 16:22 says that the Lord is "the God of the spirits of all flesh." This universal statement is in keeping with other scripture, although no other passage asserts it this clearly.

Theologically, the human spirit is described as fallen since the historic fall of Adam and Eve. Ontologically, I understand this to mean that a person's spirit is rebellious toward God and will lead him to choose to reject God or to pervert the knowledge of God, unless the Spirit precedes the influence with a sovereign drawing of the individual's spirit. The fallen spirit, acting over time, will result in a perversion of the innate values as well as of the consequent behavior and conclusions of the mental processes, at least in the religious behavior and probably in moral and general behavior as well. For example, Psalm one describes the degenerative path of walking in their way, standing in their presence, and sitting with them.

E. As the Spirit of God works within us at the time of faith-indwelling He creates in us the possibility of responding to the communication of the gospel, and then leads us to place our actual faith in Jesus Christ. If we do come in faith to Jesus Christ, we can gladly say, "God led me to His son and eternal salvation." We know that no good lies within us and that the active work is the Spirit's based on the choice of the Father and the previous work of the Son. If we do not come to Christ at this time, we know that the cause is that we resisted the work of the Spirit; which He was willing to let us do.

When faith is present in the heart, the Spirit takes up residence (indwelling) and begins the work of sanctification. Again, our part in this is "not to resist the Spirit," "not to quench the Spirit." When we continue to walk in the Spirit, we are led into the truth and a deeper walk of faith with Christ. This takes place for most people in the context of the mediation of the church in some local form and assembly. Paul can say in Ephesians 4 that the growth of the body depends on the proper working of each individual part.

As each Christian contributes his or her part using the talents and gifts the Lord has given, each member grows to maturity and the whole body is strengthened. When open interaction is not permitted, for whatever cause, the whole local body suffers.

The key to the early church was that where the presence of the Spirit is clear, God is at work. The test of spirituality is not the same as the test of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is tested by the content of doctrine. The early church was interested in the presence of the Spirit to work in the hearts and lives of people in their world. In Acts 11 the members of the church perceive through Peter's account of Cornelius that the Spirit of God has been at work, and they "quiet down and gave glory to God saying, Well then God has given to the gentiles also the repentance which leads to life." The presence of the Holy Spirit means that God is present. If God accepts these people as heirs of His Son, then the church needs to take its lead from the Spirit and acknowledge the reality of spiritual life. This does not void the test of doctrine or biblically based practice. But the ground of examination is moved to spirituality.

This is not always easy to discern. The test of orthodoxy is somewhat public and fixed; we know the contours of orthodoxy faith. But placing the test of spirituality on doctrinal grounds makes the ability to rationalize in keeping with the traditions of the church councils the test of true faith, and it was never designed or designated by God to be such.

With this foundational philosophical discussion and relevant biblical study I would like to draw a synthesis in the form of a chart.

Chart II: Categories of Experience

My Spirit

Subjective Experience

Objective Experience

Spiritual Innate

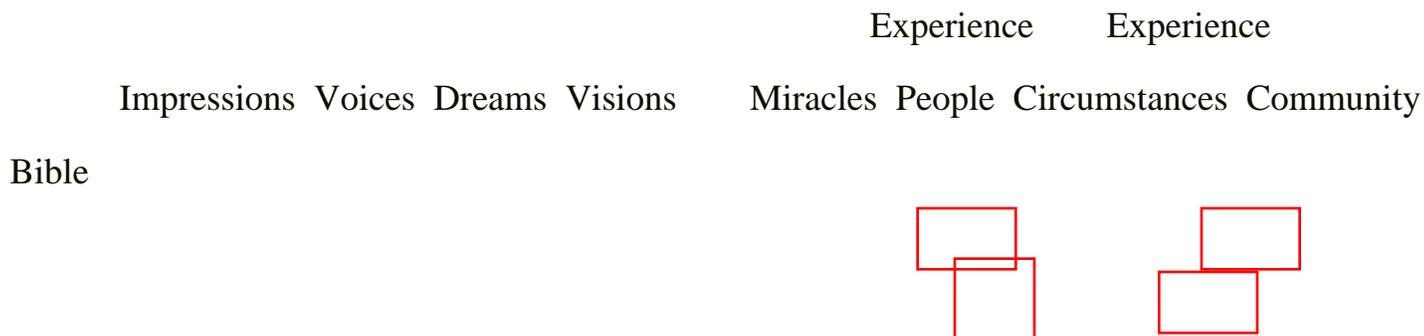
Reflective Personal

Social

Experience

Experience

Experience



The Holy Spirit

Using the terms of Chart II we can see that most of the past conceptual work has been done in the area of reflective experience (reason, memory), sometimes in combination with social objective experience. I have not found any philosophical material focusing on metaphysics of the spiritual area from a Christian perspective in modern philosophical terminology except in Rahner (cf. Clinton, 1984B, 1989, 1994).

Conclusion

Further development of the ontology of the spiritual realm and the relation of this to the ontology of the objective (experiential/historical) realm, and to the formal structure of knowledge, and to personal and social value structures, and discussion of the implications of this for theology and life may be worked out across many papers.

Conclusion

In our time (since the late 1960s), the move to post-modernism has opened the doors for secular people to examine experience more on the personal and spiritual aspects (Metzinger, Thomas. (Oct., 2005) "Being No One," *Psyche*, 11(5)). While we need not surrender or devalue the gains of the past two hundred years, we now have an opportunity to see how to present the claims of Jesus Christ and the law and promises of God to the world in some new and relevant ways. Such development would be in keeping with a renewed emphasis on the ontology of spiritual life and the importance of recognition of the work and leading of the Holy Spirit. Modern work on these areas of apologetics has long since begun in evangelical circles (Carnell, 1957; Lewis, 1972; Clark, 1993; Clinton, 1984; 1994) and gives promise of

continuing as we seek to give reasons for the hope which lies within us.

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