

Philosophy 23: Course Retrospective

1. **What is it that gives rise to religious consciousness that cannot be reduced and explained away by theories?**
 - A) How does Eliade show this? (see posted summary)
 - B) How does Kingsley show this? (see posted summary)
2. **Speculative Responses to the question of Religion and God:**
 - A) **Taliaferro** (minimal acknowledgement of the revelations of postmodernity, i.e., problems of meaning, truth, and interpretation. Very centered on the logic of propositions and conceptual clarity rather than phenomenology, hermeneutics, and primacy of existential experience). Carries forward traditional arguments updating them in light of modern science and sophisticated theology.
 - B) **New Atheists:** These arguments tend to be scientific and operate within the metaphysics of presence and myth of the given against religion and theology. They largely recapitulate the theories of religion provided in anthropology, sociology, psychology, and biology put forth in the previous 100 years in the context of a social critique of the dangers of religion to a well ordered civilized society based on rational discourse. They claim that we can have all the advantages of what is good about religion without religion; for example, we don't need religion to be ethical or to carry out acts of kindness, generosity, and good will.
3. **What is the postmodern condition that calls for a new response to religion?**
 - A) Exposure of the myth of the given and the metaphysics of presence
 - B) Exposure of the limits of science and theory generally including speculative metaphysical thought
4. **Phenomenological Responses in light of the postmodern condition: Miller, Guerriere**
 - A) **Miller: *In the Throe of Wonder*** (See Chapter Summaries 1-8)
 - 1) Recognition of the postmodern (see Chap summaries 1,4, 6)
 - 2) Phenomenology of temporality as a condition of the possibility of Wonder and Horror (See Summaries Chap 2 & 7)
 - 3) Recognition of radical contingency (Heidegger) (nothingness)
 - 4) Recognition that the rupture that temporality is presupposes an Other as the source of the rupture (since no genuine rupture of a world can come from inside it) and that radical other of time by definition must be non temporal what we call eternity, not-time. (Summary Ch 7-8)
 - 5) Use of Lonergan's insight/judgment to judge that the recognition of the necessity of eternity in time as a rupture, as an Absolute Other of time, can be judged to be God, even though we can say nothing about this in our world of meaning (none of the traditional conceptions can be used here) except that this Other gives the gift of existence out of its overflowing Otherness. A word for such overflowing giving is Love. That our world of meaning can come to be at all out of nothing and can be ruptured presupposes the Absolute Other that can be judged to be God (again, not the God of metaphysics). One of the ways we can most readily understand what a world is is when it comes into being in wonder, as in falling in love, or we have an intimation of its loss as in horror. Otherwise, we only conceive the world as a given and we conceive God as a being. Neither of these make any sense whatever from a careful noticing of the nature of consciousness and meaning.
 - B) **Guerriere** (handout: Chap 4 from *Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion*)
 - 1) Finds the source of the meaningfulness of the sacred first in the human experience of fallenness and iniquity (evil), which is the fundamental human **existential problem**, and the resulting need to be saved or made whole from this stain or damage to one's humanness.
 - 2) Religion is a fact, a response to or acknowledgment of the human need for salvation and of the experience of salvational power that is always culturally transmitted and then expressed theologically. The criterion of truth in these derivative truths can only be salvational experience. Granted very few people have this and so are related to their religion as a commitment, not through such an experience`.
 - 3) The experience of a salvational Power (the sacred) transforms and makes a human life whole, reorients or reconstitutes it through love to its wholeness or goodness. The experience of a salvational Power is a **symbolic** and **personal** experience. Since the two poles of the experience—the human person and the ambiguous presence of a personal Power—are temporal, the symbols will be historical. They arise,

flourish, and decline. At any time, the symbols of the salvational Power are correlative to the forms that human freedom gives itself (which does not mean they are arbitrary). The salvational power's active presence is an activity manifest in the experience and in symbols of the salvation Power not reducible to mere subjective states. The **sacred** always stands in a dialectical relationship with the **profane** (are mutually dependent and implicative). The ubiquity of secularization has freed the experience of the sacred from one of a cultural involuntary; it must now be achieved by each person as an explicit option. "The 'flight of the gods' is the autonomy of the religious option."

- 4) All arguments about God pro or con start with an **experience** or a **lack of experience**. No speculative arguments operate without this explicitly or implicitly. (Hence, Guerriere's critique, not that speculative arguments are useless, but that they are derivative, secondary, and only make sense from the starting point of an experience or lack of this experience.)
- 5) Science of religion cannot judge, but only describe religion and in no way can deal fundamentally with the question of the truth proper to religion.
- 6) Philosophy, in contrast, can determine a priori and explicate the criteria for judgment. However, philosophy cannot institute a judgment as to whether a religion fulfills its role in light of the truth proper to religion. That truth is not speculative or theoretical but experiential and symbolic.
- 7) Truth proper to religion is not the coherence of a discourse or legitimacy of a discourse. Truth proper to religion is manifestation or aletheia of salvational Power. Such manifestness can only be found phenomenologically in the correlation and reciprocal implication and unity of subject-object within consciousness. All awareness begins here. Hence, any religion is true to the extent that this Power is manifest in it. The original and continuous manifestation that founds a religion is the fundamental truth of any religion. Truth is manifestation and the fundamental religious truth is the manifestation of a Power that would resolve the fundamental existential problem. "Truth is that which is unconcealed, which is "seen," and not dreamt or fancied. For this reason, the true make it possible to continue the dialog, it "leads somewhere," opens a future, and eliminates frustrations and inconsistencies. Truth can be distinguished from untruth by its "fruitfulness." (William Luijpen, *Existential Phenomenology*, p 169 quoted in Guerriere)
- 8) All points of view reduce to two: Theism and Non Theism "In the end, the only tenable positions are theism and nontheism: critical experience and the lack of it." "The lack of an experience is not the experience of a lack." (Buddhism, for example, would be non theistic (lacks an experience of personal salvational Power) and is labeled an incomplete religion because it is taken to be an incomplete response to the fundamental existential condition. It is deemed incomplete because it has no symbol of cosmogonic Power. It does have action that effects salvation and symbols of such salvation, but these are not transcendent nor cosmogonic, do not give an account of how suffering arose and how the salvational Power and Being, the source, are one.)
- 9) How would the new atheists and Guerriere agree about much of religion in that Guerriere says religion is subject to fraud, superstition, mystification, ideology, illusion, etc. (falsity for/in/of Religion)? Yet Guerriere like Miller is a theist. Why should their arguments give pause to both theists and atheists that they are missing something?

5. **Buddhism: M. Siderits, *Buddhism as Philosophy***

- A. Main Features and questions (see Fourth Study Questions)
- B. Ancient Buddhism had already arrived at some of the postmodern insights about meaning, language, metaphysics and theories. Together with the emphasis on phenomenological practice of meditation, Buddhism had long since arrived at Hume's and Kant's realization that the self is not an object of experience but rather a bundle of "*skandhas*" that are causally related to or generative of later bundles of *skandhas*. We are in the conventional habit of calling this a person or self.
- C. Does Buddhism escape the critiques implicit or explicit in Miller and Guerriere?
- D. Does Buddhism offer the kind of spirituality Harris is open to without the drawbacks of theism?