



Religion in the Making

Alfred North Whitehead (Supplement)

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This classic text in American Philosophy by one of the foremost figures in American philosophy offers a concise analysis of the various factors in human nature which go toward forming a religion, to exhibit the inevitable transformation of religion with the transformation of knowledge and to direct attention to the foundation of religion on our apprehension of those permanent elements by reason of which there is a stable order in the world, permanent elements apart from which there could be no changing world.

Religion in the Making Details

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Mohammed says

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Nasser Abdullah says

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Ahmed Ezzeldien says

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Abdulsattar says

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Michael David says

I really should stop reading philosophy books.

Although I didn't really appreciate the latter portions of the book, it's enjoyable how Whitehead tries to explain the evolution of religion and the existence of God. The conclusion is particularly good:

'He (God) is that element in virtue of which our purposes extend beyond values for ourselves to values for others. He is that element in virtue of which that attainment of such a value for others transforms itself into value for ourselves.'

Mohammed Hmood says

Erik Graff says

Whitehead, co-author with Bertrand Russell of the *Principia Mathematica*, is remarkable as a philosopher strongly interested in religion who attempted to relate theology to the contemporary fields of particle physics and cosmology.

Hajar Masrour says

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Stuart says

Despite several poor analyses of Christianity, Alfred North Whitehead's 'Religion in the Making' is a further elucidation of Whitehead's genius system of philosophy which he has developed.

The book is a series of four lectures Whitehead gave at the King's Chapel in Boston in 1926. In the first he offers an analysis of the history and development of religions, in the second he analyzes dogma as a concept and dogmas of particular religions, in the third he describes the contribution of religious knowledge to

metaphysics and elucidates something of his process ontology, and in the fourth he critiques religion and refines the Doctrine of God.

The first lecture can be largely ignored. It is full of Historical-Critical speculative conclusions circa the late 19th century. It is also prior to the re-interpretations of Christianity given for the 'modern man' by neo-orthodoxy and the 'demythologization' project. Whitehead therefore stands over 'religion' and gives analyzes it in terms of 'progress' and completely botches the application of his system to Christianity. In short, even the non-Christian has a biblical theology, and Whitehead's is deficient.

The second lecture is more useful, but the particular historical errors which evidence the failure of his analysis in the first lecture become even more apparent in the second. Characteristic of all these errors is the dating required for his analysis of the book of Job. According to his paradigm, the book of Job represents a later stage in the development of religion; it is characteristic of the beginnings of the rational stage. However, Job is easily seen to be one of the earliest compositions in the entire Old Testament. If his analysis be true, Judaism has been in the rationalizing stage since its inception. On the other hand, his analysis of dogma is somewhat useful. He contrasts the respective abilities of Buddhism and Christianity to deal with the problem of evil, but he defines evil, also, in terms of his progressive process. He does give the occasional deep insight, such as when he says that, "Any proof [for God] which commences with the consideration of the character of the actual world cannot rise above the actuality of this world" (69, though he later defines God as an actual entity). Finally, he attempts to show how the emergence of dogma occurs in a 'purified' or 'rational' religion. This analysis shares some harmonies with Christianity, but in the end will likely prove to be foundationally dissonant.

His third lecture is his best. In it he outlines the contribution of religion to metaphysics. That contribution, he says, is primarily the 'bigness' of the view religions take on the world. They attempt to see the whole in light of the one. From this he describes a metaphysic in the rest of the chapter that was quite enjoyable to read, though it was written in Whitehead's typically impenetrable style. The only obvious problem (and it is an unacceptable doctrine), was his definition of God as one of the formative principles for the actual temporal world. God, for Whitehead, is the third of these formative principles, and is an actual entity which is the limitations placed on the first formative principle, creative force, which prevents absolute freedom in creativity, and thus prevents purely arbitrary consequents to their respective grounds among causal processes and produces a 'novelty' among consequent world states. This is a clearly non-Christian doctrine of God, and should be entirely disregarded by the theologian.

In the final lecture, Whitehead critiques the doctrines of religion and refines the doctrine of God. He defines God as di-polar, the ideal in which each causal process finds its 'novelty,' either unto a lower form or a higher one. In this way he overcomes objections which reason from the already established nature of Classical Theism, by arguing that, since God is creative direction, those who believe that Classical Theism's doctrine of God has any 'finality' to it are simultaneously arguing that Greek Philosophy is 'final,' and are therefore idolatrous. He defines idolatry as the belief that one has 'arrived' at a final doctrine, showing again his penchant for progression.

Whitehead's philosophy of religion here explained is immensely valuable. He is an extremely perceptive thinker who offers the Christian theologian valuable critiques that they must avoid falling into. He is a useful conversation partner for developing rigor and accuracy in theology. However, this work contains two fundamental errors which merit its 3-star rating. First, Whitehead anachronistically analyzes theistic theories in terms of immanence and transcendence. In this way he completely misses the important Trinitarian shape of Christian theology. His conception of Christian theism collapses simply back into 'Semitic Theism.' He allows only the Apostle John the space for conceiving of Christianity as more immanent than transcendent,

before he sees the Church Fathers lapsing back into a 'Semitic theism.' This is an entirely poor account of Christian theism and cannot be taken seriously except in reference to a general monotheism. Second, Whitehead's accounts of history are repeatedly poor. His handling of the history of religions does little to shake the faith of even the layman believer today, though at the time it may have done more. His accounts of the formation of Christianity from Judaism are simplistic and in many cases simply wrong. Therefore, while his metaphysical system is useful and he provides important critiques for the philosophy of religion, his tale of how religions form should be more or less disregarded and his criticisms of Christian theism in particular should be found lacking apart from philosophical problems presented by the concept of theism in general.

Geoffrey says

Four essays on religion. The first focuses on the evolution of religion from earlier, more emotive, to later, more rational forms. The second focuses on the solitary character of the experience of more advanced religious forms. The third links this conception of religion into a concept of God and of moral order, and then back into his philosophy of process. The fourth comes back to the question of dogma, doctrine and truth. What Whitehead does is lay out religious experience as a necessary part of the universe. However, his idea of religion embraces "science as a religion". Furthermore, he is not so interested in proving the existence of God, but rather in making some statements about what God is and isn't. His approach is therefore fundamentally Spinozan. As someone who has spent a year struggling with Whitehead's cosmology, I am familiar with many of the basic tenets of his philosophy of process. I therefore enjoyed this little book as it takes his ideas and repackages them in relation to religion. He is a very cogent thinker. The reader unfamiliar with his philosophy will find the third essay more difficult, but overall the book is much simpler to read and understand than *Process and Reality*.

Rizal Nova Mujahid says

Menyenangkan akhirnya bisa menemukan buku ini. Sangat susah nyarinya. Tau-tau ada edisi bahasa Indonesianya aja. Sayang udah nanggung baca. Coba tau ada versi bahasa Indonesianya. Hm....

Belum selesai, jadi summary juga belum mateng. :)

Tidak seperti dalam aritmatika, tidak ada kesatuan definisi untuk menyatakan kebenaran suatu agama. Yang pasti, karakter seseorang berkembang sesuai dengan arah keyakinannya. Agamalah yang menyucikan kehidupan batin. Karenanya, kebaikan religius pertama adalah sincerity yang mendalam. Sedang pada intinya, agama adalah solitariness. Dari sini, yang diharapkan dari agama adalah karakter yang layak. Yang penting dari agama ialah makna transendennya, hal ini bias dilihat dari bukti-bukti sejarah.

Walau tidak memberi dampak yang sama dalam kurun sejarah, pun urutannya bisa berbeda, tapi dari ekspresi lahiriahnya dalam sejarah, agama memiliki empat faktor penting. Ialah ritual, emosi, keimanan, dan pertanggungjawaban rasional. Pada tahap, keimanan dan rasionalitas mau tidak mau harus kita kesampingkan, sedangkan emosi hanyalah efek samping dari ritual. Perlahaan emosi dianggap lebih penting, hingga ritual dijalankan untuk membangkitkan emosi tertentu. Lalu muncul kesaksian keimanan yang berusaha menjelaskan ritual dan emosi. Dengan munculnya keimanan, benih rasionalitas telah ditanamkan dalam agama. Zaman para martir dan syuhada dimulai dengan munculnya kecenderungan yang lebih rasional.

Tahap awal dari agama secara hakiki bersifat sosial, sedang tahap akhirnya mengenalkan manusia pada kesendirian. Dari komunalisme—praktek agama yang berhasil mempertahankan struktur sosial dan membentuk masyarakat menjadi lebih maju—agama kemudian bergeser dengan berupaya mengangkat makna hidup dan religiusitas individual.

Agama rasional adalah buah dari munculnya kesadaran religius yang bersifat universal, bukan kesukuan, pun sosial. Namun, karena agama adalah apa yang dilakukan individu dengan kesendiriannya, ia harus mengambil jarak dari lingkungan sosial dan berefleksi terhadap kehidupan untuk menarik prinsip-prinsip umum dan menyelesaikan masalah yang dihadapi manusia.

Problematika evils—kejahatan moral, penderitaan, dan kesengsaraan—misalnya, walaupun diselesaikan dengan cara yang berbeda-beda, semua agama berupaya membebaskan diri dari kungkungan ini. Namun, bisa dikatakan, jalan yang ditempuh niscaya serupa. Mengangkat hidup ke tingkat yang lebih tinggi dengan cara mengalahkan kejahatan dalam diri.

Problem favorit lain dari agama ialah upaya mencapai kebijaksanaan. Refleksi atas pengalaman aktual merupakan jalan utama untuk menyimpulkan prinsip-prinsip umum. Kadang disampaikan dalam bentuk pepatah atau kalimat yang jenaka, bersahaja, sederhana, dan tentu saja reflektif. Namun, bukan berarti emosi diabaikan begitu saja, hanya agama tidak membatasi diri pada momen-momen yang melulu emosional. Sehingga, seringkali kebijakan bukan merupakan sebuah hasil formulasi pemikiran, semata deskripsi langsung dari “insight” dan intuisi.

Agama dibangun berdasar kemunculan—secara bersama dalam satu momen—tiga konsep serumpun.
Nilai individu bagi diri sendiri;
Nilai antar individu dan hubungan satu sama lain;
Nilai dunia objektif, ialah hasil hubungan antar individu yang merupakan syarat eksistensi tiap-tiap individu.

Kesadaran religius merupakan pengembalaan refleksi diri untuk menemukan nilai hidup. Perjalanan yang bermuara pada kepasrahan pada klaim universal namun sekaligus merengkuhnya bagi diri, sehingga bisa mewujudkan karakter ideal. Tidak dimungkiri kesesuaian ini tidak mungkin tercapai sedetil-detilnya. Namun, seluruh intuisi kesesuaian dan perbedaan itu membentuk kontras yang kemudian dicurahkan pada pengalaman religius. Dan selama kesesuaian itu belum tercapai sepenuhnya, evil tidak mungkin musnah dari dunia.

Dalam berbagai hal, pemahaman akan Tuhan bisa ditarik dari tiga konsep. Imanensi, transendensi, dan monisme. Walau menghadapi masalahnya masing-masing, namun bisa dikatakan ketiga konsep itu melihat Tuhan sebagai sesuatu di luar mereka yang memiliki kemahaan dan seringkali harus mengabaikan rasionalitas.

Leyla says

4 y?l sonra ikinci kez okumama ra?men ilk kez okuyormu? hissine kap?ld???m kitap..Fikirler, hissiyatlar, zihin; durmak bilmez geli?im ve de?i?im, nas?l tuhaf!

Chase says

Very interesting ideas laid out in a relatively cohesive way that seems to fall apart and contradict itself in its conclusion. Toward the end, it became quite reminiscent of Huxley's Perennial Philosophy and his metaphysics started to reek of the same simplicity he claimed was an arbitrary solution to the problem. After making the claim that "all simplifications of religious dogma are shipwrecked upon the rock of the problem of evil," he describes an (arguably) simplified metaphysical view of God while attempting to sneakily sidestep this Shipwreck Rock by placing God one step below the infinite, claiming, "The limitation of God is his goodness." He goes on to state this God cannot be infinite because then "he would be evil as well as good," which would "mean mere nothingness."

Pick a stance, bubbalou.

Ultimately, to Whitehead, an ordered world could be no other kind and demands, not necessarily an author, but a sort of mediator of creation and synthesis among formative elements, acting as the "ground antecedent to transition."

Yeah, I had to read that like five times too, don't worry.

Erin says

I am sure this was ground-breaking philosophy in its day, but I did not feel like I was treading new ground with it, here in 2013. The book is transcription of Whitehead's lectures, and that leaves a little to be desired in the reading, though it is not a hard read, just dense and a bit meandering. I think this is a good foundational book and an excellent resource text, but it was not a work that I felt gave me a ton of new ideas. And that is not Whiteheads fault. It was new when he lectured on it, but has since become cannon that everyone else has built on. That being said, its always good to go back and read the original author, and Whitehead is certainly that.
